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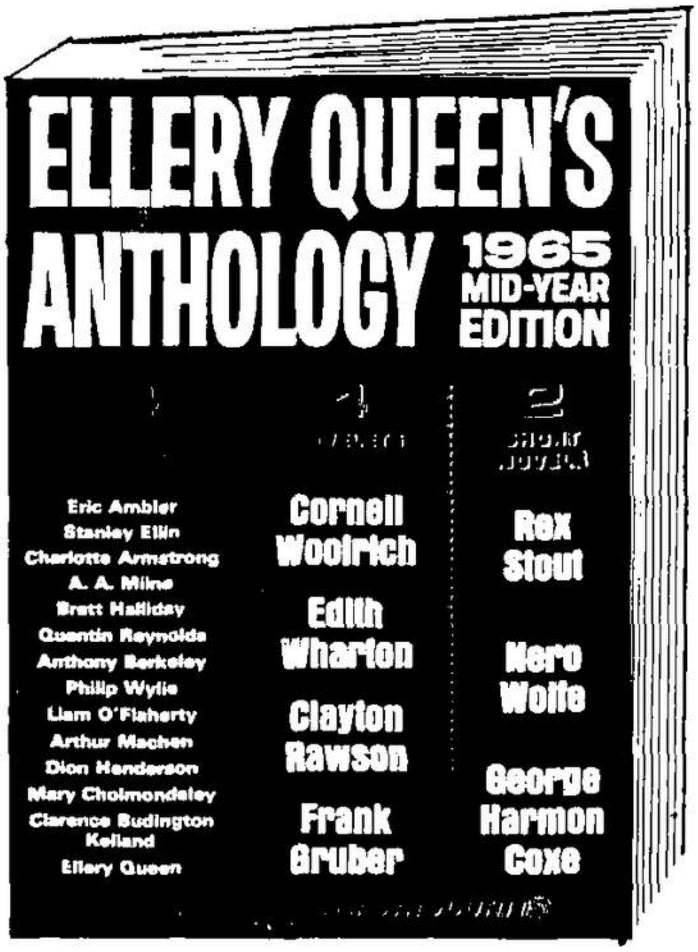
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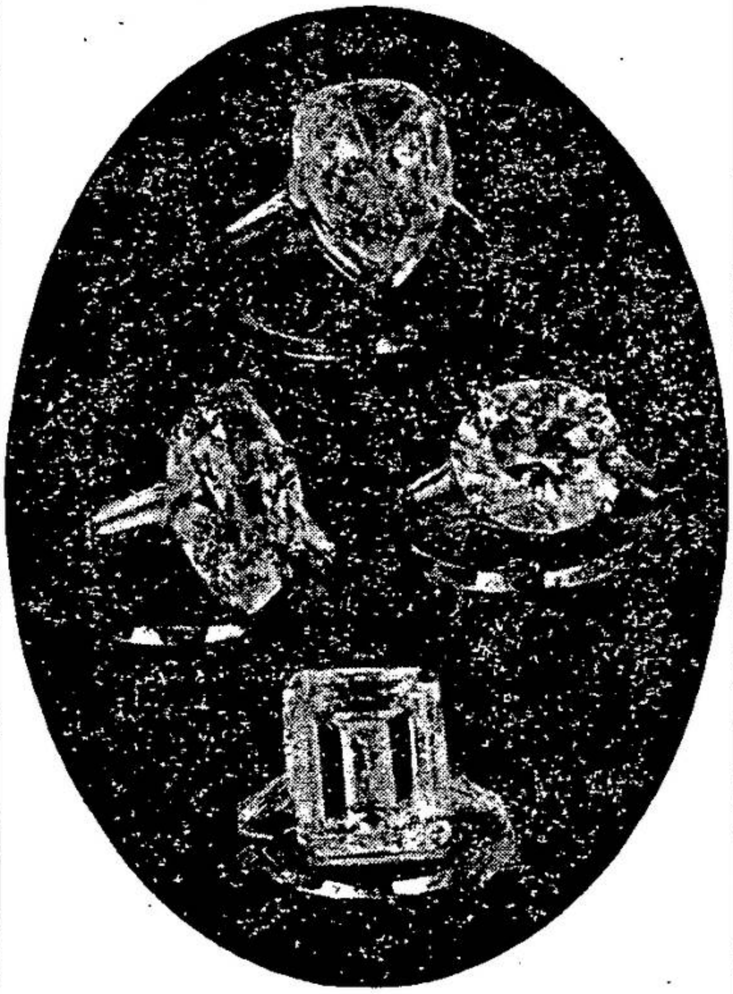

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the newest Jericho story by

HUGH PENTECOST

JERICHO AND THE PAINTING CLUE

by HUGH PENTECOST

JOHN JERICHO, STANDING ON THE hillside a foot or two away from his easel, looked like a figure out of some other age and time. He was a tremendous man, six feet six, with a massive muscular body to match, his bright red hair and pointed red beard blowing in the wind. Against the high blue sky he looked like some ancient Viking hero, like a mythological god.

The view from where he stood took in a sweep of the Berkshire valley, brilliant in its fall foliage, with the town's church steeple and clock tower rising above scarlet maples. To his left, a few hundred feet down the hillside, was the old deserted brick factory which, they said, had once made guns for the Army of the Potomac.

Jericho, a black curve-stemmed pipe clenched between strong white teeth, scowled at the half-finished landscape on his easel. The enormous vitality that was characteristic of his work was somehow missing. He knew why. Sue Walker had got in the way of his work ten years ago, and she was in its way again.

Jericho had come to visit Sue at Fairleigh against his better judgment. He had known that she would get under his skin again and that it would be a long time before he could once more rid himself of his carefully buried hunger for her.

Their break-up ten years ago had been handled with a kind of dramatic reasonableness. He was a wanderer—a searcher for some kind of truth he couldn't find, a man who could only stay in one place long enough to record in oil what there was to see, to make what comment there was to make, and then move on. Sue, who laughed at the things he laughed at, who shared his bitter observations of a world which man made to flourish and then slowly destroyed, loved him as he loved her—with a passionate completeness that should have been perfect. But there was one flaw in an otherwise perfect relationship.

She was fabulously rich. She owned a vast estate in Fairleigh, a small island in the Caribbean, a duplex apartment in New York. Her life moved in a small circle, following the sun and the seasons from one place to the other. Her pleasures were expensive, luxurious. She could no more give up all she had and follow him around the world than he could settle down to being a well-kept, if beloved, poodle in her domain.

And so Sue and John had parted, and she had married George Walker who, two years before, had died of sclerosis of the liver. That particular poodle had lived on alcohol.

Three days ago Jericho had received a wire from Sue. I WILL NEVER ASK ANYTHING OF YOU AGAIN. PLEASE COME. He had wired back: IMPOSSIBLE. And five hours later he had arrived. Of course, he should have known better.

There were four other guests at the Fairleigh estate. There was an attractive young couple named Conway. Ray Conway, a writer, had evidently been a project of Sue's—perhaps more than just a project at one time. But he was married now, and had a best-selling novel to his credit. There was Mike Farr, a dark Irishman in his mid-forties, lawyer and business manager of Sue's large fortune. And there was an amiable young man named Lucius Terrell.

Lucius Terrell was the reason Jericho had been summoned. He was to be Sue's new husband. God help him, Jericho thought when he saw him. Her energy and vitality would burn him up before he could escape.

"You could save him, John," Sue said in the first minute they were alone together after he had bluntly told her his thought. "You know there is no man in the world for me but you. And if there was any other woman for you, you'd have found her long ago."

For a futile moment they were suddenly in each other's arms, torn by the old hunger. Then he picked her up bodily and sat her in a chair. "Do we have to go through all the reasons why not once more?" he asked.

But Jericho didn't sleep that night. Around and around went the old arguments attempting to show how it could be. At six in the morning he was up, painting equipment under his arm, striding over the hills. Work was the only answer; work was more important than anything else.

Jericho was suddenly aware of the little Jeep bouncing cross-country, headed up the hill toward him. A young boy, unknown to Jericho, was at the wheel. He came to a skidding stop by the easel.

"Mr. Jericho?"

"Yes?"

"Mrs. Walker has been kidnaped, sir. Mr. Farr wants you to come at once."

"What are you talking about?"

"She went out driving in her sports car early this morning," the boy said. "She didn't come back for breakfast. A little while ago Mr. Farr got a phone call. Someone has her. They're demanding ransom."

Jericho vaulted into the Jeep beside the boy. "Let's go."

"Your painting things, sir."

"Later," Jericho said. "Get moving!"

"The instructions are simple enough," Farr said, his face white and set in grim lines. The Conways and Lucius Terrell were pale, motionless dolls. "No police. Draw two hundred thousand dollars in cash from the bank and wait for the next instructions."

"Two hundred thousand dollars!" Jericho exploded. "They must be out of their minds!"

"I can raise it," Farr said. "I have Sue's power-of-attorney. The question is, do we do it, or do we call in the police? I don't want to take the responsibility alone."

"Of course you do it," Terrell said in a shaken voice. "All that matters is getting her back."

"Jericho?" Farr asked.

Muscles bulged under Jericho's tweed jacket. He was in the grip of a kind of impotent fury. "How long will it take to get the money?"

"Couple of hours."

"You go that far," Jericho said. "They may be watching. Then when the next instructions come we'll decide."

Jericho needed to think, away from the frightened Conways and the helpless Terrell. Mike Farr had gone off to the bank, or wherever, to get the money. Jericho strode out across the country again. He would pick up his painting gear on the hillside.

Reason told him they should go to the police who would call in the F.B.I. Emotion told him they should pay the money. Sue could afford it. Why risk her life at the hands of some kind of twisted monster?

The conflicting ideas went back and forth, like a ball in a tennis game. The police would certainly be in it later no matter what they did. The kidnapers couldn't use Sue's flaming-red Ferrari to take her away—it would be too noticeable. They would have to abandon it, and sooner or later someone was bound to report it.

Jericho reached the point on the hillside where he had left his easel, with the canvas still on it. He bent down to pack his paint box and palette when his eyes rested for a moment on the picture he'd been painting when the word came. It was not quite the same as he had left it.

Someone, in his absence, had painted in a little patch of blue sky in the left-hand section of the picture, near the roofline of the old brick factory. The color had been already mixed on his palette. The new patch of sky was therefore right in color, but the amateurish brush work hit Jericho like a blow. It must be a piece of vandalism, he thought, the work of some mischievous kid.

Jericho glanced from the crude patch of blue sky to the factory at the foot of the hill. Slowly a deep frown creased his forehead. His artist's eye told him instantly that something was wrong. The factory was not precisely as it had been, but for a moment or two he couldn't tell what was different. A good painting is a matter of balance—a dark spot here balanced by a light spot there, a massive object there balanced by a bit of vigorous design or color here.

Then he saw what it was. A small thing. When he had been painting the factory, a steel boom for a block-and-tackle mechanism had protruded from the second-floor eaves. Now it was missing. The little patch of crudely painted sky had obliterated the boom from the picture. The vandal, he was suddenly sure, was no mischievous child.

Small hairs rose on the back of Jericho's neck. He had the sharp sensation of being watched. Was someone wondering if he'd noticed? He moved slowly, packing up his gear, not looking again at the factory. When he had it all together, he started down the hill, walking briskly until he reached the cover of the dark pine woods at the foot of the hill.

Instantly he put his gear on the ground and turned to look out through the protective brush at the factory. It had been deserted for years; it still looked deserted.

Jericho moved swiftly through the woods until he had circled back around the factory, where he saw a rear door hanging crookedly, on broken hinges.

Jericho darted across the open space to the door. The rusty hinges screeched as he opened the door and wedged his way inside.

"That you?" a voice called down from the second floor—a man's voice.

An old iron stairway led up to the second floor. Jericho reached it and bounded up. There was only a second in which to see what was there. Sue's bright-red Ferrari reposed placidly in the center of the floor. Sue was in one of the bucket seats, obviously tied there, a handkerchief knotted tightly at the back of her head acting as a gag.

And there was the man, small, dark, startled—but with an automatic aimed straight at Jericho as he came to the top step. It wasn't a moment for indecision. A shout of anger burst from Jericho, thundering in the open space, as he hurled his two hundred and forty pounds straight at the man with the gun.

There was a stab of flame from the gun, and Jericho felt a searing pain in his left arm. But there was no chance for the little man to fire a second time. Jericho was on him. He broke the little man's gun arm over his knee like a piece of kindling. Then he swung his right fist in a powerful backhand blow. It caught the little man on the jaw and he went spinning away like a top. He screamed as he somersaulted backward down the iron stairs.

Jericho was after him, pouncing on him almost as he hit the bottom. The little man lay still, his head twisted at a grotesque angle.

Jericho stood up, nursing his left arm with his right hand. A trickle of blood ran through his fingers. The little man, he knew, was dead of a broken neck.

He turned and hurried back up the stairs. His left hand was useless, but he slipped the gag off Sue's mouth before he began to work at the rope knots on her wrists and ankles. She was half laughing, half crying.

"John! John! My darling John," she kept saying.

"Stop yammering and tell me what happened," he said grimly.

She had gone out looking for him that morning and hadn't been able to find him. She'd finally parked, just to sit and think. The little man had come from nowhere, gun pressed at her throat. She'd been tied and gagged. He'd then driven the Ferrari straight across the fields to the factory. A crane had been fastened to the car—something evidently long planned—and had lifted it, with Sue inside, to the second floor of the factory. After that—just waiting.

"And dying slowly of terror, John."

They went out of the factory together, and he told her of the kidnap scheme. Out in the sunshine she helped him make a tourniquet for his arm with a strip torn out of her slip. They started to walk along the deserted back road toward home.

They'd gone less than a hundred yards when a car came toward them, traveling at a dangerous speed.

"It's Mike Farr!" Sue said.

She stepped into the center of the road, waving her arms. The car skidded to a stop. Farr got out, carrying a brief case. His face was the color of ashes.

"My dear Sue, you're safe!" he said in a relieved voice.

"John found me," Sue said. "What are you doing out here, Mike?"

Farr patted the brief case. "The ransom money," he said. "I got a phone call instructing me to bring it to the old factory." He looked at Jericho. "I didn't think it was wise to wait for you to return—Sue was in too much danger."

"They phoned you at Sue's house?" Jericho asked.

"No, my office. I went there after I'd raised the money. They must have been watching my movements."

"The first call you got," Jericho said. "I forgot to ask you. That came to your office, too?"

"Yes."

"No witnesses to either call?" Jericho's right hand closed tightly over Sue's wrist. "How did you know where to send the boy for me this morning?"

"Why—we guessed you were out painting."

"But you couldn't know I was at that exact spot because I didn't know where I was going myself. Sue looked for me and couldn't find me."

Farr moistened his lips. "The boy was just lucky enough to find you," he said.

Jericho's hand tightened on Sue's wrist. "It won't work, Farr," he said. "Your little friend back there in the factory spilled the whole story after I did a little persuading on him."

"John!" Sue said.

"Quiet!" Jericho said sharply. His eyes blazed steadily at Farr, who seemed to have suddenly shriveled inside his clothes. "Your marriage to Terrell was going to be a disaster for friend Farr," he said to Sue. "There'd be an auditing of your accounts. How much is the shortage, Farr? Say, one hundred and seventy-five thousand? Your little friend had to have a piece of the action. Say, twenty-five thousand for him for risking the chair?"

Sweat ran down Farr's face. He looked quickly to the right and left. Jericho moved, and his right hand twisted Farr's arm in a painful lock.

"You pay off your accomplice," Jericho said, "and then replace the missing funds in Sue's account. She's out two hundred thousand, but it would seem to have been paid to the kidnaper."

"I'm sorry, Sue," Farr said. "I was desperate."

"Your little man made one mistake," Jericho said. "When I started to paint my picture, the boom was projecting from the factory, ready and waiting to pick up Sue's car when she was brought there. The steel boom was in my painting. After I was summoned back to the house, Sue and the car reached the abandoned factory, were lifted to the second floor, and the boom was withdrawn.

"Then your friend saw my easel. It worried him. He went over to see what I had painted and found the boom in my picture. He didn't want me or anyone else to remember that boom. So he painted it over with a little blue sky—he thought. What he didn't know was that I would instantly recognize any brush stroke that wasn't mine."

"He told you that?" Farr asked.

"He told me nothing," Jericho said. "He's dead." He let go Farr's arm. "I'll take charge of that brief case," he said. "Suppose you now drive us to the State Police barracks."

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Now, meet the bombastic Bohemund and his flamboyant friend Swindle Sheet in two mad, mad yarns told in embellished and embroidered prose.

I: THE HAUNTED TYPEWRITER

by GERALD KERSH

"IF I'VE TOLD YOU ONCE I'VE TOLD YOU A HUNDRED TIMES: MY FRIEND Bohemund Raymond was not only a great newspaperman, he had the Gift of Prophecy," said Swindle Sheet Morris, leading me into Red Lion Street. "Inherited it from a Saracen ancestress. Oracular, at times, I grant you, but accurate—right on the nose—if you knew how to read him. A little erratic in his ways, I concede, and apt to relax with an appetizer or two here and there, or a nightcap, or an eyeopener. But a genius, and inspired from—" Morris pointed toward the soot-eroded and pigeon-polluted rooftops. "He had Second Sight. Come upstairs."

Swindle Sheet Morris had a two-room flat over a second- or third-hand furniture shop. There was a litter of papers, beer bottles, potato chips, and small bundles of laundry ready for the wash. On a little gas stove, carefully grouped, stood a burned-out whistling teakettle, an empty pot of bloater paste, a leaning tower of teacups, three forks in a jam jar, and a Sumerian kipper in a crematorial pan.

"You may find the place a little stuffy," my host told me, kicking aside a sardine tin.

"No, no, not at all."

"It's all those old sofas and mattresses downstairs." He found some beer and a carton of pickled red cabbage. "See that typewriter? That's *the* typewriter."

It stood on a little metal table near the window—a big, old-fashioned desk model, badly battered, such as you may see in any newspaper office; a rakish, disreputable, promiscuous old machine that had submitted to hard usage by a thousand pairs of heavy hands and had adjusted itself to none. Heavily stenciled on the frame was the inscription: *Property of Lovejoy Press—Not To Be Taken Away.*

"*The* typewriter?" I asked.

"His typewriter. Bohemund Raymond's typewriter—the one he said was haunted. All his work was done on that machine. He wouldn't let anybody else touch it—the way some people won't lend you their fountain pen. Bohemund said the typewriter *knew* him.

"Like an old uncle of mine who used to get paralytic drunk every Saturday night. He drove out to his favorite pub in an old pony trap. When he'd got properly petrified, the landlord would simply chuck him in the trap, and the pony would take him safely home all on her own. Well, Bohemund used to feel that way about this old machine. So I pinched it for a relic after Bohemund died.

"Now, as you may have heard, Bohemund was a marvelous touch-typist, faster and more accurate than anybody in the office. But—trust Bohemund Raymond—he had a system of typing all his own; he used to sort of cross his hands like a concert pianist so that it made you feel giddy to look at him. And, funny thing, the drunker he got the faster and more accurately he typed.

"Now, we all have our little faults. One of Bohemund's little weaknesses was bragging. Sometimes he bragged about the Princess Ayesha, the so-called Saracen priestess; and sometimes he bragged about his ancestor the Crusader, who married her—whichever boast took his fancy at the moment. But two things he never ceased to brag of: one was his 'ineluctable prescience,' as he called his strange knack of predicting news; the other was his 'incontestable and infallible touch' on this typewriter.

"He called the machine Rataplan—which, according to his story, was the name of the old warhorse that belonged to his crusading ancestor. It seems the old nag was blind in both eyes, and yet by sheer instinct was the best horse in the army.

"Now, you know that Bohemund Raymond and I were always the best of friends. But there comes a time when even your best friend can get on your nerves a bit—especially in a year like 1937, when every wet-eared copy boy went about prophesying like Habbakuk, and the very beggars in the doss houses were asking each other if they'd done wisely in letting Chamberlain become Prime Minister.

"It got to be a bore. You went to bed in Belsen-Belsen and woke up in

Berchtesgaden. You had Goebbels for breakfast, Goering for dinner, Ribbentrop for tea, and Hitler for supper—and everybody knew all about everything. You know what they used to say: it was all bluff; Hitler and Company were a lot of dope fiends who retained their power by giving each other medals; there weren't any Generals left in Germany because Hitler had purged them all; and the German Army was a myth—they simply photographed one company of crack infantry and ran the reel ten times over. All the German tanks were made of wood and canvas. The Maginot Line was impregnable. I tell you, I for one got battle fatigue before the bloody event!

"But Bohemund! He got so that you dreaded meeting him in a pub. Old Lord Lovejoy had put him on to writing that famous series of editorials—the ones that always ended, *And What Are You Going To Do About It?* Like Cicero with his *Delenda Est Carthago.* Bohemund was having the time of his life prophesying to his heart's content. He had to cut the fruitiest bits out of his headlines, but even what was left took a dreadful kind of turn.

"But Lord Lovejoy—it was his funeral, after all he owned the papers—stuck to his guns out of sheer perversity. Of course, he was able to say 'I told you so' later on; but those editorials of Bohemund's didn't make us very popular at the time.

"And all the while Bo was drinking gin like a zinc drainpipe. He used to be pretty well sozzled by opening-time; went on steadily until three o'clock in The Pig's Head, walked across the street to the Press Club, and kept it up till about an hour before deadline. He'd just about manage to flop into his chair. Then it was something marvelous to see him.

"He never faltered. He'd snap a sheet of copy paper into old Rataplan and rattle off a thousand words of perfect prose, touch-typing with a look in his eyes like a radio operator's on a sinking ship. In forty-five minutes it was all over. The boy picked up the copy, and Bohemund staggered into a taxi and went home.

"Now, one day Lord Lovejoy sent him to France to have a look at this impregnable Maginot Line. Bohemund locked this old typewriter in a closet and gave me the key, making me swear I wouldn't let anybody else type on his machine while he was gone.

"And then this horrible idea came to me. I got hold of a typewriter mechanic I knew, and I said to him, 'Alf, there's a little job I want you to do for me. Take all the letters off the type bars of this old machine, and put them back all jumbled up. Leave the keys alone, you understand—only mix me up the letters so that if somebody hits an *A,* for instance, he'll get a *K,* and so forth. Only you must be ready to put that type back as it was originally at an hour's notice. There's a couple of pounds in it for you,' I said.

"So Alf did what I told him, and I locked poor old Rataplan back in her closet, and waited. After a few days Bohemund Raymond comes home full to the gills with old Calvados, and turns up at The Pig's Head worse than I'd ever seen him before. He went straight onto gin.

"I gave him his key, and asked him, 'What news, Bohemund old boy?'—and stood back waiting for an earful. Imagine my surprise when he just said, 'Wait and see'—nothing more. But his eyes were full of something a bit more dangerous than Calvados, and I thought, either he's really gone and overdone the booze at last, or he's caught himself a bad fever.

"Now, I had to go out of town that afternoon, and I kept thinking and thinking about that witty trick I'd played on Bohemund; and the more I thought about it, the un-funnier it got. So I phoned the Press Club to confess to Bohemund and warn him to use some other machine. But he'd left early, having told the fellows there that he was about to astound the world with the greatest prophecy of all time.

"I buzzed the office. Bohemund Raymond had tottered in and got his typewriter, touch-typed his piece as usual, and staggered out of the building yellling, 'I've done it! It is achieved!'

"As soon as I got back to town, late that night, I went straight to the office and asked about Bohemund's story. There was some little excitement about it. When the Editor saw the piece he screamed like a maddened horse and called for Bohemund; but Bo was nowhere to be found. It appears that instead of going home he had gone to a Turkish bath in Jermyn Street. There, in the steamroom, he'd wrapped himself in towels and made a veil out of a net loincloth, and stood there uttering gibberish in a falsetto voice.

"When they finally hauled him out he said he was the Princess Ayesha, prophesying. So they called a policeman, and he was taken to the station, where they recognized him and didn't charge him. The sergeant gave him a cup of tea, and had him put in a cab and taken home. But he didn't go home. He went to some hotel, and slept it off.

"Meanwhile I had got Alf to fix up the machine again, and put it back in its place—having had the foresight, of course, to get a duplicate key made for the closet. And I hoped no harm would come of it all.

"Well, they winkled Bohemund Raymond out of wherever he was next morning, and had him up before Lord Lovejoy. And what passed between them at that interview I never quite knew; but knowing Lovejoy, I had my misgivings, and I don't mind telling you that when I went to The

Pig's Head for a sausage-and-mash at lunchtime, I felt far from easy in my mind.

"But when Bohemund came in I was absolutely appalled. His face was spiritless. He looked like a man five days dead.

" 'Morris,' he said to me, 'Morris, look at this, for God's sake!'

"And he fished out of his pocket a couple of sheets of yellow flimsy that looked as if they'd been crumpled into a ball and then smoothed out again.

" 'Lovejoy threw it in my face and threatened to fire me, as usual. But when I saw this stuff I could only apologize—for the first time in my life I apologized to Lord Lovejoy! I said something must have gone wrong with my hands, or my typewriter.' Lovejoy said, 'Well, what the hell *was* this famous prophecy you were shouting your head off about? Rewrite it!'

" 'I said I would. But when I sat down, Morris, *for the life of me I couldn't remember one word of what I'd written!* Morris, I looked at old Rataplan, and there was nothing wrong with her. Morris, never breathe a word of this to a soul! I fear I am going out of my mind.'

"So I said, 'Have a drink, Bohemund.' He said, 'I'll have a glass of ginger ale. I'm off the hard stuff from now on—forever.'

"And still I said nothing about the trick I had played. Face to face with Bohemund, I simply lost my nerve. It was Alf, the typewriter man, who split in the end. By that time Bohemund Raymond had been on the wagon for almost a year—imagine it, almost a year! It *could* be argued that I did him some little good, maybe? I hope so, but I doubt it. The awful thing was, that Bohemund forgave me. I thought I'd die then. Gerald, there was a very great man!"

Swindle Sheet Morris opened an old tin box and rummaged in a litter of souvenirs—racing cards, autographed menus, and whatnot—and took out two crumpled sheets of copy paper. He said, "When Bohemund chucked it away, I picked it up. Can you imagine Lovejoy's face when he read *that?* Or poor Bohemund's humiliation?"

I took the papers and saw the following:

> Waf iakh er aaumqa lbala ssad tunsabal mash naquatal ruma nihaa andzu hooralhi lalalga deed
>
> Oulanya squtay uhuma. Hak azas at tarsaal qadar.
>
> Way a tazauag alhila lwal sa leebta khtb urgad dubzee al alf rigl waya temzali kfeea amda mual ginse eal ass faree.
>
> Way a tazauag assal eebalkhu ttafmas ssal eebalma akoof feel nari

waldami khennaval tahemua ikhamlual assad takhtal qadeebwa lfas wassal eebal maksoor.

Way a ssaadual assa dubaadi zali kmaalni erwatu alaq alduf daamin aqda miha.

Wuy a ndazilu ragou lonlaar goulal ahubi esmbaida ti annis rdubba nlahualf rigl waha atass amalnis rufeea azlate hekhish yatsaldu bikhat ayataza wagefee aam (alfwa tiss umiv aussit teen) takh ttale aalass adalmug annekhzee raasan nisr.

Waf eehazi hialsa na alsa natalkham soonmin kharbal alfazya assoo duassala amquem mamana alatwar tafa at fau qaalkhar abiwa alaanqa adialar dalmah rooka.

I said, "If you got Alf to tell you exactly how he scrambled those keys and then typed this stuff back, striking the keys Raymond would have struck if his machine had been in its usual order—"

"Don't worry," said Morris, "I tried that. It still makes no sense."

"Could I make a copy?"

"If you like . . . and if you sell the yarn to some magazine, you might remember to give me a twenty-five per cent. cut, old boy?" He sighed. "It can't hurt Bohemund now."

I must have told Swindle Sheet Morris' story to twenty people in the years that followed. In fact, I talked myself out of writing it, such as it was. This story would never have been put down if, one April in 1955, I had not fallen into a discussion of cryptograms with Dr. Marengo. He is a remarkable man, well-known as a political cartoonist under the pseudonym of Kem, but also famous as a linguist who is familiar with at least fifteen European and Oriental languages.

Chatting discursively while I turned over an old box file of unconsidered scraps of paper, I remembered Bohemund Raymond's great prophecy. My copy of it was still there. I gave it to Kem and asked him what he made of that.

He said, "But this is not a cryptogram. It is Arabic, written phonetically —so far as that is possible—in Roman letters; only some of the words are broken up and others run together. One needs only to read it aloud, and it becomes quite clear. I mean, the words become clear."

"Did I hear you say *Arabic*?"

"Yes . . .

Wafi akher aa 'um qalb al assad tunsab al mashnaquat' al rumaniha aand zuhoor al hilal al gadeed. Oulan yasqut ayuhuma. Hakaza sattara alqadar

This means, in English,

> In the last year of the Heart of the Lion, the Roman Gallows must stand against the New Moon. Neither may fall. So it is written.

That is a fair translation of the first paragraph."

I said, "Roman gallows? That's the Cross! New moon? The Crescent of Islam. Last year of the Heart of the Lion—the year Richard Lion-Heart died!"

Kem said, "Yes, Gerald. 1199. Now the second paragraph,

> Wayatazauag' alhilal wal saleeb takht burg ad'dub zee alalf rigl, wa yatem'zalike fee aam damu al ginsee al assfaree

means, in English,

> Cross and Crescent Moon shall be married under the Symbol of the Bear With 1000 legs. This is in the Year of the Blood of the Yellow Men."

I cried, "Why, this obviously refers to the U.S.S.R. The Bear With a Thousand Legs is Russia—Cross and Crescent Moon means Hammer and Sickle! Go on, go on!"

"Freely translated," Kem said, "the third paragraph says,

> Cross and Crook shall wed Crooked Cross in Fire and Blood when Lion is devoured by Lamb under Rod and Ax and Broken Cross . . ."

"Why, the Stalin-Hitler Pact!" I shouted. "Hammer and Sickle shall wed Swastika when Lion—that's Britain—is devoured by Lamb—Hitler's astrological sign was the Lamb—under the Fasces of Mussolini—rod and ax—and the Nazi Swastika!"

"Hm!" said Kem. "The next paragraph is rather curious:

> Wayassa adu al assadu ba'adi zalik maal 'nier watu'alaq al dufda 'a min aqdamiha.

It means:

> Then the Eagle shall rejoice with the Lion and the Frog shall be hung by the feet.

Surely, this must refer to the victory of the Allies, and the death of the Bullfrog of the Pontine Marshes, Mussolini. They did hang him up by the feet, you know."

I begged him to go on. He continued, "This last piece is perhaps the most curious of all . . .

> Wuyand'zilu ragoulon la argoula lahu. Bi 'esm baidati an'nisr, dubban lahu alf rigl. Wahaatassam al nisru fee . . . et cetera, et cetera . . .

This says, in effect:

> A Man With No Legs shall combat in the Name of the Egg of the Eagle, the Bear with 1000 legs. The Eagle shall yearn toward its loneliness for fear of the Bear until in the 1960th (?) Year it marries under the Sign

of the Winged Lion with the Eagle's Head. In the 50th (?) year of the War of Words, Peace shall come in high places above burnt earth.

And what do you make of that?"

I said, "Man With No Legs? Franklin D. Roosevelt, surely? Egg of the Eagle? Democracy in America! Yearn toward its loneliness? The Monroe Doctrine! Fear of the Bear? Concern at communist infiltration. But the last two lines—what do *you* make of them?"

Kem said, "It would appear to mean that somewhere about 1960—one must allow for calendar variations—say, 1960-something—there will be a peaceful world union led by English-speaking nations . . . But where did you get this document, Gerald?"

I told him Swindle Sheet Morris' account of the trick he had played on Bohemund Raymond.

Kem laughed. "Morris was playing a trick on you too, Gerald."

"What, in Arabic? That would have been a bit too subtle for old Swindle Sheet. Besides, this was before the War, back in 1938."

"I must also take into consideration the fact that you too like your little joke, Gerald, and may be playing a trick on me," said Kem.

"In Arabic?" I asked again. "Anyway, I give you my word of honor that I'm not playing any tricks!"

"It is just a little too strange, that's all," said Kem. "I suggest that we regard this as nothing but a hoax, a Fleet Street joke. It will be healthier that way."

"Let it be so regarded," I said. "I only wish poor Swindle Sheet were alive to hear this, though."

And I wish I knew exactly what Bohemund Raymond, or whatever spirit took possession of him, meant by those last two lines. We must wait until 1960-something, whichever year it may be. It can't be long now.

II: *A Matter of Pink Elephants*

ENGLAND WAS HOPELESSLY DEFEATED BY THE AUSTRALIANS AT CRICKET—OR had Edward VIII abdicated? Whatever it was, Fleet Street was in a ferment. The event is unimportant now. It was driven out of my mind by Bohemund Raymond. Alternately snapping and foaming like a lidded beer mug, or almost inaudibly sibilant like a glass of some heady wine, he took me by the lapel.

"Cub," he said, "gnashing your milk teeth among the scattered guts with the jackals—look upon these tripehounds and be warned. As they are, so may you be if you're not careful—fixed, fixed in time, with your clock set at exactly twenty-five minutes after the event. Newshawks! Bah! Sparrows. At the fall of Troy their kind was there, hopping hopefully under the tail of the Wooden Horse. Be warned, cub, be warned."

Now, although Bohemund Raymond was notorious from Blackfriars to Temple Bar for his consumption of hard liquor, and was never completely sober, I believe that his general appearance of inebriety was emphasised by a peculiar manner of speech: he spoke with a slow, slurred Devon drawl and had, moreover, that inability to pronounce two successive consonants which is supposed to be characteristic of the Arabs. For example: he would pronounce *strong* something like *issitirong*. But he had such vehemence that this trick of pronunciation lent a kind of melodramatic color to whatever he said.

Now, it happened on this particular evening that an old soldier who had at last sold an article about elephants' tusks to the *Daily Special*, of which Bohemund Raymond was Night Editor—a silly fellow half demented with malaria—happened to say in our hearing, "That man talks with a *chi-chi* like a Wog. I should know—was with Allenby. Is he a Wog?"

Bohemund Raymond looked at the man steadily, letting go of my lapel, and said in a resonant voice, "What, you derelict? By Wog I take it this hanger-on means Arab. By God, my fathers took Antioch when this excrescence's mangy people were still herding swine! Damn it," he cried, pointing to an artery in his lean throat, "in this vein runs the blood of Bohemund, of Richard and of Godfrey! My ancestress was the Princess Ayesha—you clod!"

The old soldier, fatuous with bottled beer, said, "All those fathers, what, and only one ancestress—no, I mean to say—"

"I'll Wog you," said Bohemund Raymond; and so he did, with a pewter mug. And, as I learned later, he saw to it that the old soldier's article was rejected the next day—threatened to resign if it were published; so that the Features Editor, who hated Bohemund bitterly, decided to take a year off and write a great novel; wrote nothing of the sort, of course, and was last seen shaking with typewriter fatigue in an alley behind a Features Syndicate.

It was not that Bo Raymond was vindictive: he was a generous, even a magnanimous man. But he could not bear to be touched in his ticklish spot—his ancestry. True, he came from the West of England, where the Phoenician strain runs strong. Yet he disclaimed descent from those dark Vikings of the Levant—he was, he insisted, a lineal descendant of a great

Crusader and one Princess Ayesha whom his ancestor carried off and had baptized out of hand and married after the Battle of Antioch. And Ayesha, Bohemund maintained—in the late hours after he had put the paper to bed, and before he put himself to bed—was a prophetess, divinely inspired, a true Cassandra.

It was she, Bohemund said, who foresaw the fall of Antioch and the Battle of the Spear. He loved to recount, in the most circumstantial detail, the circumstances of that famous mad charge of the Crusaders . . . A monk saw in a dream the place where lay buried the spearhead used by a Roman legionary at the foot of the Cross; the relic was unearthed, the Crusaders followed it as a banner, and won a miraculous victory.

As he told of this, one of his faraway wild looks would come into Bohemund Raymond's dark-pouched black eyes and he would say, "And I, too, my friends, shall perish by rusty iron in the right hand of mine ancient enemy . . ."

For when he had taken drink—and when had he not?—Bohemund Raymond often made such cryptic prophecies. We all remembered this one after he died of blood poisoning in 1939, having run a rusty paper clip into his left thumb. *In the right hand of mine ancient enemy?* Why, who but Bohemund was Bohemund's ancient enemy?

By that time he had drunk himself out of half a dozen important jobs around Fleet Street—or rather, argued himself out since, drunk or sober, he was a master newspaperman—so that at the time of his death he was Features Editor of the tottering *Evening Wire.*

The news of Bohemund's passing was received as such news is generally received in the Newspaper Rows of all the world: some grew maudlin and said, "We'll never see *his* like again"; some said, "We told you so"; some gloated.

That elephant-tusk man whose pitiful article was still going its dog-eared rounds said that it was the clip fastening *his* story that had caused Bohemund's death. And all of a sudden everybody knew a hundred scabrous stories about the one and only Bo Raymond.

One old advertising man who had entertainment-expensed himself into the kennel of the small-ad peddlers said that Bohemund Raymond had survived as long as he did only by blackmailing Lord Lovejoy, the Press Baron. Nodding like a porcelain Mandarin off-balance, he said, "Bo Raymond knew where the body was buried."

Then Swindle Sheet Morris, a crime reporter of the old school, gasping over half an inch of cigarette—mysteriously, he never had more or less than half an inch of burning cigarette stuck to his lip—stepped forward and shouted, "You be damned for a dirty little ad man! Bohemund wouldn't soil his hands on such as you—but I don't mind if *I* do, you wart! Bohemund was my friend, and so I tell the whole stinking pub-load of you! You're not fit to drink the water Bohemund Raymond washed his socks in, and if anybody wants to deny it, come on—single-handed or mob-handed, come on! . . . You'll stand by me, Gerald?"

I said, "Sure, sure, Morris."

With emotion he went on, "Ah, we knew him, in good times and bad—didn't we, Gerald? We were cubs under Bohemund—weren't we, Gerald? Why, he was a genius and a prophet, wasn't he? He was wise *before* the event—you know that. Lord, when the old *World-Globe* went bust and was bought by Lovejoy, who predicted it? Bohemund Raymond! You little layabouts, I see him as plain as I see you—plainer—saying, 'Morris, the World is coming to an end, and the Globe itself will dissolve.' And this, mind you, was in 1917—eh, Gerald?"

It may have been that Bohemund Raymond was referring to coming world events which, at that date, were casting their shadows before. The reckety old liberal *World-Globe* wasn't snatched by Lovejoy until 1926. But Swindle Sheet Morris, like his hero, was a hard man to argue with.

He continued, "Bohemund was like a father and a mother to me. He tore up every word I wrote; he treated me like a dog; he bashed me into shape, made me what I am—didn't he, Gerald?"

I could only nod; when Morris was a cub reporter I must have been about seven years old.

"Bohemund once played chess with Capablanca. Would have beaten him if he made a certain move at a certain moment. He showed me afterwards—"

"—yes," said a sturdy old Parliamentary Correspondent, Jack Cantwhistle, "Bohemund was the ablest man in The Street. If only he hadn't had that bee in his bonnet—he had to *foresee*. Dangerous practice; no part of a newspaperman's job. Guess, yes; but keep it to yourself. Bohemund was like Jonah—the one the whale swallowed—who was annoyed with God because Nineveh wasn't destroyed after he'd prophesied that it was definitely going to be. Now, what use is a prophet, anyway—even a true prophet? He says that such-and-such a thing is *positively going to happen*. It happens. So what? Or he says that such-and-such a thing will happen unless you do so-and-so. You do so-and-so. It doesn't happen. What does it prove? I loved old Bohemund, but he made a laughingstock of himself."

Morris said, "That doesn't alter the fact that Bohemund's prophecies *always* came true!"

"He drank too much," said a columnist with a red nose.

Morris growled, "If he took a glass of beer between meals to clarify his intellect, what's the matter with that?"

The old advertising man sniggered, "Tee-hee! He clarified his intellect all right that time he saw snakes and tigers and things, and Lovejoy sent him away for a rest cure, eh?"

Swindle Sheet Morris bellowed, "Why, you human lavatory! I tell you Bohemund's intellect was never clearer than the day he saw snakes and tigers and things! I was his assistant at the time, and I ought to know. They said it was d.t.'s, but it was nothing of the sort. Now you listen to me . . ."

Swindle Sheet Morris then told us how, in the spring of 1930, Bohemund's wife ran away from him. To her, as to everybody else, he had prophesied, saying, "You will find me intolerable." So she did. Then Bohemund became slightly crazy on a mad mixture of *Can such things be?* and *I told you so.* He worked on, however, brilliantly efficient, but like a man in a trance.

They said he never went to bed at all; souped himself up for the superhuman efforts of the day with whiskey, as a smash-and-grab man soups up a borrowed car for one mad dash in the few minutes between the shattering of the jeweler's window and the rush to the hideout. So Bohemund Raymond worked, blasting and rattling at unnatural speed from sunset to sunrise, leaving behind him a trail of frightened faces, broken glass, scattered jewels, and shrill whistles.

Now, those who said that Lord Lovejoy tolerated Raymond because that phenomenal newspaperman "had something on him" did the memory of the Press Baron a grave injustice. Everybody had something on Lovejoy; those who hadn't, invented something; and much he cared! Ruthless, yes; brutal, unscrupulous, tyrannical, pigheaded, ignorant as dirt—yes, Lovejoy was all that. But a good man at heart, and neither a coward nor a fool.

It was simply that Lord Lovejoy either liked you, or he didn't. True, he was apt to like or dislike you for the wrong reasons; but he was as staunch a friend as he was implacable an enemy. He happened to have a fondness for Bohemund Raymond—which was proof in itself, Morris maintained, that Lovejoy was not at all stupid.

Morris here cited the occasion when Lord Lovejoy—you never could predict his movements—returning from Canada where he had been buying some forests for pulp, looked in at the office dressed in a filthy mackintosh. The night doorman, who was drunk and new on the job, said, "Who the hell are you?"

The potentate replied, "Lord Lovejoy."

Laughing heartily, the doorman said, "Sure, and I'm Bombardier Billy Wells, the heavyweight champion of England."

Lovejoy then asked, "And what do you think of the *Daily Special*?"

The doorman said, "Indade, and I wouldn't use the damned rag to wrap tripe-and-chips in, only my little bhoy Mickey likes to color in the Fashion Section wid his little box of paints."

At this point his lordship's secretary arrived, breathless, and bowed him upstairs to the office with the solid onyx desk. Lovejoy said, "Bombardier Billy Wells. Take him off the door. Make him Children's Editor. Start a painting competition, Empire-wide, for children under twelve. Five thousand pounds in prizes and scholarships . . . You were four minutes late. You're fired . . . Where's Bohemund Raymond? Never mind, I'll go myself."

Lovejoy found Bohemund Raymond in the News Room drinking neat gin out of a lemonade bottle. The night's work was nearly over. Raymond's hand was bleeding—he had impaled it on one of the spikes they use for rejected copy.

"What's new, Raymond?" Lord Lovejoy asked.

In his double-clipped voice Bohemund Raymond replied, "Ah, I see serpents. I see the road ahead, nightbound and full of maddened beasts . . . The Mermaid is on dry land—I hear her dying cries . . . Help, help! The tiger is loose in the streets! The giraffe bleeds, noiselessly moaning, and the great crocodile is at large, and the little bejeweled dwarf squeals—"

"—now I'll tell you what it is, Bohemund, old man," said Lord Lovejoy. "You've been on the booze and you're losing your grip, and you'd better lay off. Snakes and tigers and giraffes—you'll take three months' holiday, with pay, and go to my place in Scotland. Not another word!"

Then he called his secretary, and said, "Spray, you were four minutes late. You're slacking off. You want a vacation. So does Mr. Raymond. Pack up and take him to Loch Lovejoy at once. But mind this: if I hear that one drop—only one drop—of liquor has passed his lips during the next twelve weeks, you're both fired once and for all. Get cracking!"

He turned to Swindle Sheet Morris and said, "Morris, take over in Raymond's absence. And by the way, Morris, I notice on your expense account that you laid out seventeen shillings sixpence for a luncheon in Macclesfield. This is insulting my intelligence. There *is* no way of spending seventeen and six for luncheon in Macclesfield. Try that once again and you're fired."

After that, having admonished a night Sub for eating pencils, he told

Raymond, "Off with you. Anything very remarkable turns up, let me know." And so went home to bed.

So Bohemund Raymond left for Scotland with the teetotal Mr. Spray.

They had not been gone many hours when one of Lord Lovejoy's private telephones buzzed by one of his bedsides, and an unmistakable voice said, "You said if anything remarkable turned up to let you know. Do you hear me? Are you there? Bohemund Raymond calling from Dogworthy Junction. Listen. The Mermaid is breathing her last; she is groaning; her weary breasts heave and her shiny skin is getting dull. Will nobody fetch sea water?

"Hold it! The tiger prowls the streets spreading terror! The Seventh Dwarf bleeds and his tiny wife screams as she binds him with diamonds while a rat with orange-colored teeth, a rat five feet long, munches ham sandwiches, and a dumb giraffe, fourteen feet tall, bestraddles the foul and horny crocodile. Hold on! The giraffe is coming in at the window, while apes screech and gibber—"

Lord Lovejoy rang off, called the office, said, "Memo: Positively fire Raymond and Spray. Lovejoy," and read himself back to sleep with *The Little Flowers of St. Francis.*

Next morning, however, all the newspapers except Lord Lovejoy's had lurid stories of a bizarre affair at Dogworthy Junction. The Northbound Express had collided with a circus train, and for several hours most of the menagerie and side-show exhibits were loose at the station.

The Genuine Mermaid—a miserable Manatee cow depicted on the posters as a blonde with a fish's tail, combing her hair and singing, but looking in fact like a kind of sea elephant with leathery dugs—fell out of her broken tank and bellowed her last at the stationmaster's feet.

The Biggest Rat in the World—a capybara, or water pig—got into the canteen. The manageress of the canteen, who was afraid of mice, went out of her mind.

One of a team of midget acrobats, The Seven Dwarfs, broke his leg—the *Daily Flash* ran a big picture of his thirty-inch-tall wife applying first aid in the form of a tinsel skirt.

A spavined giraffe put his head through the window of Bohemund Raymond's compartment, and cut himself badly.

A broken-spirited Bengal tiger was only too happy to get back to its cage, but the cameraman made a good picture of it, including a policeman armed with a pitchfork.

The crocodile got into a carload of Scots salmon, and was more difficult to dislodge.

Lord Lovejoy called the office again, and said, "Memo: positively unfire Raymond and Spray. Lovejoy."

According to Swindle Sheet Morris, a sense of awe had come upon the magnate.

". . . so I was Acting Night Editor on the jolly old *Daily Special* for exactly four days, or rather nights," said Morris. "Then Bohemund came back, sullen and surly and silent. He went right up to Lord Lovejoy and said, *'Well?'*—just that.

"Lovejoy looked at him and said, 'Damn it all, Raymond, you're sober!'

"Bohemund said, 'Well?'

"Lovejoy said, 'Take three days off and get drunk. Spray, go with him, and if I hear that one drop of water has passed his lips between now and Friday, you're fired.' "

Somehow the laughter this story gave rise to irritated Swindle Sheet. He said, "What I tell you is stone-cold, stone-ginger, dead-honest truth, but all you can do is laugh—and the earth still fresh on Bohemund's grave! If you want to hear any more about Bohemund, you can go and whistle for it. I simply tell you: Bohemund Raymond never made a prediction, however crazy, that did not come to pass. Now then! . . . Gerald, finish that drink and let's go somewhere else. Now you know what they mean when they say that a prophet is not without honor except in his own country. Come on . . ."

I followed him. He said, "Let me get back in the mood, and I'll tell you a *real* story about Bohemund Raymond . . ."

EDITORS' NOTE: *At the end of one of his letters to us Mr. Kersh wrote: "If you like Bohemund Raymond, I was thinking of doing a few wild and woolly stories about him and his pal, the crime reporter Swindle Sheet Morris." Wild and woolly? Gerald, we can't wait!*

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **FLETCHER FLORA**

TITLE: ***My Father Died Young***

TYPE: Detective Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Past and the Present

COMMENTS: *It took more than a decade for the pieces in the strange pattern to fall into place, and nearly two more decades before the mystery was finally solved . . .*

THERE IS NO WAY BETTER CALCULATED to recall old times and old places than opening the grave of a person you once knew long ago. It was not actually a grave, though. It was merely a niche in the wall of my family mausoleum, which stood aloof and slightly apart within an iron picket fence in the cemetery east of town.

Nor did I do the opening myself. It was done by competent workmen, hired for the purpose with official sanction, while I waited at the open door of the old tomb and looked out across green grass and gray headstones, scoured by a morning rain and now drying in the afternoon sun. I could smell red clover in a nearby field.

When had I come with my mother to bury my father in this old place? It was a long time ago, but a time easily remembered, for there were associations vivid enough and grim enough to have impressed even a ten-year-old boy. It was a time of soup kitchens and doles and idle men. A man named Franklin Delano Roosevelt had just been nominated for the presidency of his country, and in the fall he would be elected.

There was unrest everywhere at that time, and in the midwest there was an extraordinary number of bank robbers, although the banks, unfortunately, were failing fast enough without help. It was, in brief, 1932, and my father died in August of that year.

The best that can be said of him

is that he was a young man. Otherwise, he was sadly deficient in the qualities that make a good husband and father, and my mother's marriage to him was a mistake she eventually regretted. He had no capacity to earn money or to apply himself for any length of time to constructive work, but his faults were not all negative. He had more than his share on the positive side, and the quality I remember most vividly was his insatiable appetite for bootleg gin. Not that he was ever abusive or brutal; he was merely indifferent to his family responsibilities.

However, my mother and I did not go hungry. In fact, we did not want for anything. Her family had accumulated some money and property in our town, and my memory of the depression was fixed mainly by things that hardly touched me personally. My maternal grandfather had been a prosperous undertaker, and my Uncle Ned had succeeded to his trade and condition. Folk must bury their dead in any time, good or bad, and there is usually a small insurance policy to guarantee payment for services.

Uncle Ned used to complain about the depression and make a great show of pinching pennies, but he gave us a generous allowance every month, and delivered it promptly along with a stereotype lecture to my mother on the foolishness of young girls who married wastrels and drunkards before they were old enough to make sound judgments.

My father died suddenly. He was, as I have said, a young man. To me, of course, he seemed old enough, but I learned later that he was three months younger than the century. I was shielded from most of the unpleasant experiences connected with his death, and he seemed not so much to die as simply to disappear. I was first told that he was sick, and then that he was dead, and the next thing I knew he had been taken to one of the rooms behind the little chapel in Uncle Ned's establishment, where Uncle Ned, as a concession to my mother's sensibilities, was giving him individual attention. Before the funeral, I saw the body only once, and that was when, with my mother's permission and in her company, I was allowed to look at my father in his casket in the chapel.

When he was alive, he had earned scant respect, and now that he was dead, he excited little regret. For that reason, it was decided to make his last rites as simple and unostentatious as possible. The funeral was private, and the casket was kept closed. However, for those who were motivated by more than morbid curiosity to look at my father for the last time, it was arranged to make the body available to the public for an hour on the evening before the day of the burial, and for another hour on the morning of the day.

During these two brief periods his

casket lay open in the chapel, and friends could pass by it to the recorded music of an organ. Not many took advantage of the opportunity. In the vestibule of the little chapel there was a registry for visitors to sign, and this was later taken by my mother, who gave it to me, and I have kept it all these years, for some strange reason, and have it still. In it are less than a dozen signatures.

I was not, of course, required to compete with even this small group for a last look at my father. I was taken to the chapel early on the evening before the funeral, and there, with my mother's hand holding mine and Uncle Ned's arm around my shoulders, I stood briefly beside the casket.

My father's face looked quite natural, hardly more drawn and drained than I had often seen it on the morning after a night devoted to a bottle. I could not feel any great sadness or sense of loss, and I was sorry that I couldn't, and wished that I could. After a while Uncle Ned took me home, told me I was a good boy, and left me with a neighbor woman who had come in to watch over me.

I did not sleep well that night. I was troubled because I had been able to feel so little for my father who was, whatever else he may have been, young and dead and almost friendless. My troubled thoughts nagged me well into the next morning, and finally I decided that I should go, before it was too late, and see him again. The unnatural stiffness of the circumstances, I thought, had dulled my feelings and made it impossible for me to react properly. If I could see him once more, perhaps alone, sorrow might come to ease my guilty conscience. My mother had already left the house, and so it was an easy matter for me to slip away undetected and make my way to the chapel.

But it was too early for the final hour of public visits, and the chapel was closed. I tried the door and found it locked. Leaving the vestibule, I went around the chapel, through Uncle Ned's office, and into the area in the rear. But all the other doors were closed, and there didn't seem to be a soul there, which was odd and unusual; and then I heard the mumur of a voice and of another voice in apparent reply. They came from one of the closed rooms, and I went to the door and listened. The words were faint, a little blurred, but distinguishable.

"Did you get my ticket and reservation?" a voice said.

"Here they are," another voice responded. "The reservation is for the ten o'clock train to Chicago tonight."

"You'll have to drive me to the city in time to catch it."

"Don't worry about it. I'll get you there."

"Thanks, Ned. I can't tell you how much I appreciate your kindness."

So one of the speakers was Uncle Ned. I felt relieved, somehow exonerated of eavesdropping, and I promptly announced my presence by knocking on the door. There was, following this, a rather prolonged interval in which nothing happened, and then Uncle Ned opened the door and saw me standing there.

"Why, Calvin!" he said. "What on earth are you doing here? Come in, boy, come in."

Entering the room. I was surprised and a little alarmed to find my mother present. I was afraid she would be angry with me for coming to Uncle Ned's funeral parlor without permission, but apparently she was not. She smiled in a kind of abstracted way, as if she were thinking about something quite remote from my petty delinquency, and came over and put her hand on my head.

"Hello, dear," she said. "This is a nice surprise. Say hello to Dr. Crandall."

Dr. Crandall was the only other person in the room. He seemed to me at the time tremendously experienced and wise, but he was actually in his late thirties and had been in practice no longer than ten years at most. Besides being a personal friend to my mother and Uncle Ned, he was our family physician and had attended my father before his death, and so his presence was not unusual. I spoke to him politely, as he did to me.

"Why have you come here, Calvin?" Uncle Ned said. "You were to wait at home until we called for you before the services."

"I came to see Father again," I said, "but the chapel's locked."

"Father's not in the chapel now, dear," my mother said. "Uncle Ned had to bring him back here until it was time for his friends to come to see him. It's nearly time now, isn't it, Ned?"

"Very nearly," said Uncle Ned, looking at his wrist watch. "I'll take him back to the chapel in a few minutes. If you want to see him again, Calvin, I'll let you into the chapel now. You may wait for us there."

My mother's comment, followed by Uncle Ned's, called my attention to a casket resting on a mobile table against the wall. My father was obviously in it, awaiting his return to the chapel, but now that I was here, I was strangely reluctant to see his face again, It was better, I rationalized, to remember him as he had been when alive rather than try to force an unnatural emotional response. Suddenly I wished I had not come, and wanted to go home again. Compulsively, I said so.

"There's a sensible boy," said Uncle Ned. "We'll fetch you later for the services."

"You must walk straight home, dear," my mother said. "It would be bad to cause any alarm in case you are missed."

"Don't worry," said Dr. Crandall. "I have to be leaving, and I'll be happy to drop him off. Wait for me in the vestibule, young fellow."

My mother kissed me and patted my head again, and after I had waited a while in the vestibule, Dr. Crandall and I left together. My mother came home later, and we were fetched on schedule for the services that afternoon. There were only a few people there, the services were brief, and Father's casket was sealed afterward in its niche in the mausoleum.

Father had not been a good man or a reliable provider, and his short life had left a residue of bitterness; but I was astonished to discover that he had recently taken out a life insurance policy in favor of my mother for $50,000. This was a small fortune in those hard times, and I was inclined to modify my harsh judgment of Father until I learned that Uncle Ned had negotiated the policy and paid the premiums in order to protect my mother in the event of my father's death.

My mother did not regret my father's passing. If she felt a little sadness, the feeling was tempered with relief. Always a pretty woman, she became prettier and more animated. Dr. Crandall, who was a bachelor, began after a decent interval to pay serious attention to her, and in two years they were married.

I approved of the marriage and was fond of my stepfather. He was a kindly, generous man, and by treating me without condescension he made me feel significant and mature. He had, moreover, an active curiosity about a variety of subjects, and was especially a devoted student of hypnosis. He argued strongly for its beneficial use in the practice of medicine, and I have even heard him make out a good case for its prospects as an anesthetic in certain kinds of surgery.

Following his example, I eventually entered State University as a pre-med student, and after three years was admitted to medical college. It was during my third year as a medical student, slightly more than a year before my internship, that the pieces of the pattern began to fall into place in my mind. Most of the pieces were old—fragments of memory that had lain dormant for more than a decade; but the final piece in the pattern, the one that wakened all the others, was something that happened that year, my third year in medical college, when I was home briefly for the Christmas holiday.

I had been out with a local girl who had proved both shy and dull, perhaps the latter because of the former, consequently I was home rather early. My mother and stepfather were entertaining a couple in the living room, and I was passing down the hall on the way to the stairs when I heard my stepfather say something that made me stop.

I could see the four of them, my parents and their two guests, from my position in the hall, and they could have seen me if they had looked in my direction. But they were interested in what they were discussing, and my stepfather, in fact, seemed quite intense about it.

"I can make you stiff as a post in sixty seconds," he said.

"Nonsense," said his male guest, a lawyer named Phillips.

"Would you care to have me demonstrate?" my stepfather said.

"Perhaps you'd better be a bit more specific before demonstrating."

"Agreed. I'll tell you exactly what will take place. As I said, I'll hypnotize you within sixty seconds. You will fall over, but don't worry—I'll catch you and let you down easy. Your body will be rigid. While you are in this state, I'll suspend your body on its back between two straight chairs. Your head will barely be in contact with one chair, your heels with the other. You will admit, I think, that such a suspension would be absolutely impossible under normal circumstances. However, to make the feat even more incredible, I'll sit on your abdomen while your body is suspended and you still will not bend at the neck or hips."

"Oh, come now! That's absurd. You're going too far."

"It sounds dangerous to me," said Phillips' wife. "I forbid any such foolishness."

"There's no danger," my stepfather said to Mrs. Phillips. "His breathing will be indiscernible, but I assure you that all the life processes will be going on as usual. He will awaken at my command in perfectly normal, healthy condition, and he will call us all liars when we report what happened."

"You're on!" said Phillips. "I challenge you here and now to give such a demonstration."

That's the gist of it. I cannot, of course, after all these years, reproduce their conversation verbatim, but I can still see that demonstration as my stepfather performed it in our living room. Every claim he made was substantiated. The lawyer lay suspended between two chairs as rigid as a steel rod, and he did not bend a fraction under the weight of my stepfather on his stomach. I have seen the thing done since on the stage, but at that time it was the most incredible performance I had ever witnessed.

Phillips was brought out of his trance, and I immediately went on upstairs, still undetected. Lying in bed in the marginal state between waking and sleeping, I kept reviewing in my mind the remarkable show I had just seen. As I have said, I had known for years that my stepfather was a student of hypnosis, but I had not dreamed he was capable of anything so extraordinary. I would have suspected a trick—collusion perhaps between the two men—but I had actually seen the thing done, and I knew that trickery was impossible. There is simply no way for a normal human body to sustain suspension under the circumstances I had witnessed. I could hear my stepfather's voice repeating in the stillness and darkness of my room a word or a phrase or a sentence that I had heard from the hall, and suddenly I was listening intently.

You will have the appearance of a corpse, he was saying.

And then a strange thing happened. I was hearing all at once another voice in another time in another place. It came to me as a whisper over more than a decade of intervening years, and I was a boy again outside a door in a building that smelled of death.

Did you get my ticket and reservation? the voice had said.

It trailed away, a whisper diminishing to a sigh. After a silent interval of seconds or years, it came back.

Thanks, Ned. I can't tell you how much I appreciate your kindness.

When I had first heard those words, so long ago, I had assumed they were spoken by Dr. Crandall, the man who was later to become my stepfather. I had made this assumption, hardly thinking about it, simply because he was the only man, besides Uncle Ned, to be seen in that room when I was admitted. But another man had been there. A third man who had spoken with an irony that I had mistaken for simple gratitude.

My father had been there in his casket, and it was his voice I had heard.

Call this a revelation if you wish. Call it what you will. As for me, I prefer to believe that it was an instance of long-delayed insight, a tardy wakening of dormant truth that had been waiting in my subconscious all those years for the one missing fragment of knowledge that it needed to rouse it.

Whatever you call it, whatever it was, I did not reveal it to my mother and stepfather. I took it with me as my secret to the medical center where I was studying, and in the following week or two, between practice diagnosis and theoretical treatments, I reassessed the circumstances of my father's death, and every odd circumstance fell into a new and startling pattern.

Let me itemize them, one by one.

In the first place, consider the cast. There was my father, a wastrel and an alcoholic and altogether a problem. There was my mother, who wanted to be rid of him. There was my Uncle Ned, who loved my mother and despised my father and practiced an essential trade. There was, finally, the man who became my stepfather, Dr. Crandall, who also loved my mother and also despised my father and also practiced an essential trade.

Consider the strange factors of my father's death. Attended by Dr. Crandall, taken care of later by Uncle Ned personally, he was ill, he died, and he was prepared for the grave in what amounted to almost complete secrecy.

Then the funeral. Remember that the services were conducted with a closed casket. The two brief periods when my father had been exposed to the public view had been daring and brilliant strokes. Hypnotized, lying in the appearance of death with his breathing reduced to an indiscernible level, he had allayed all possible suspicions that might arise. Between the two periods—the night before and the morning after—he was revived and fed and rested in secrecy. After the second period—before the funeral in the afternoon—he was revived again and held in secrecy until Uncle Ned, that night, could take him to the city to catch the train to Chicago. There was very small risk in this. After all, my father had been observed in death by nearly a dozen people. Even if he had been seen later by someone who happened to know him, the slightest disguise would have been sufficient to maintain the deception.

Finally, consider the insurance policy. It had been arranged by my Uncle Ned, not as protection for my mother, but as a bribe to induce my father to participate in the conspiracy. No doubt Uncle Ned could have raised $50,000 if he had been forced to, but it was, after all, much less painful to have it paid by an insurance company. And no doubt my father, being what he was, was glad to leave with the money either in his pocket or soon to be delivered.

Shall I confess something? Once I had reassessed the circumstances and become convinced of the truth, I felt, far from shame or guilt, a kind of perverse pride. It was surely one of the most bizarre and daring conspiracies to commit fraud that had ever victimized an insurance company. Moreover, the fraud had been incidental. The primary purpose of the conspiracy had been to rid my mother of my father.

I did not know what happened to my father later, and I must say I had singularly little curiosity about it. Inasmuch as my mother had remarried two years after my father was last seen, I could assume that he had died, or had secured a quiet divorce in some remote place, or that my mother and Dr. Crandall, protected by father's part in the conspiracy, had boldly committed bigamy. To me, it didn't much matter. I loved my mother and respected my stepfather, and I was certainly not going to divulge anything to hurt them. Besides, you see, I had no tangible evidence. However much I *knew,* I could prove nothing.

And so I lived comfortably with my guilty knowledge until all the parties to the conspiracy were dead. Uncle Ned was the first to go, then my stepfather, and finally, my mother. Then, when all were beyond hurt or harm, my mental attitude changed. I was beset by a persistent and intolerable itch to know once and for all, and beyond any possible doubt, whether I was right or wrong. In brief, I simply had to know if my father had gone to heaven or to hell or to Chicago. Did his casket hold his bones or merely ballast?

I came back to find out. As I said in the beginning, I arranged to have the niche and the casket opened, and

I employed competent workmen to do the job. I waited at the open door of the mausoleum, and remembered all these things, and smelled red clover in the sunlight following rain, and the work was eventually done.

The casket was laid out on the floor, and the lid was opened. The workmen, in deference to me, had gone outside.

I went over and kneeled beside the casket and looked in—and I wish I hadn't. I would give anything now if only I hadn't.

For, you see, my father's bones were there, still wearing the blue suit that had, in the dry niche, survived the years that had made dust of his less durable flesh.

But that was not the horror.

The horror was peeping over the edge of his breast pocket, where he himself had put it so that it would be immediately available for use when he should awaken to a command that was never given.

Even before looking closer, I knew that it was a train ticket to Chicago.

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KING AND QUEEN OF "STORY"

Who has not heard of Whit Burnett, distinguished editor, teacher, and short story writer? With his former wife, Martha Foley, he founded the world-renowned magazine, "Story," whose high criteria all these years have been literary merit, artistry, and originality. Among the earliest contributors to "Story" were Kay Boyle, James Farrell, and Erskine Caldwell; and "Story's" remarkable "discoveries" include the now-famous William Saroyan, Richard Wright, Norman Mailer, Truman Capote, Tennessee Williams, and Eric Knight. Vol. 1, No. 1 of "Story" was a mimeographed magazine, published in Vienna in 1931, and this first issue is now an eagerly sought-after collector's item.

In 1942 the reins of "Story's" editorship shifted to Whit Burnett and the present Mrs. Burnett, Hallie Southgate Burnett, novelist and short story writer, and this Royal Family co-editorship continues today.

"Story" and EQMM have so much in common within their respective fields (especially in aims of quality and influence, and in the importance of "discoveries") that it occurred to us it would be interesting to publish a pair of stories by the Burnetts—stories by Whit and Hallie Burnett that fall into the mystery-crime-suspense genre. Almost no sooner thought of than done—for here is such a pair of short stories.

Both tales are character studies in depth, with undertones that will give you more than a suspicion of "frisson"—with overtones that will give you more than a suspicion of "horreur"—with (to coin a word) sidetones of something curiously unidentifiable which lurks within so many of us in a secret place where it may lie sleeping, quiescent, but never dies . . . a quality of terror and peril—but how different this quality reveals itself in two stories written by husband and wife!

THE NIGHT OF THE GRAN BAILE MASCARA

by WHIT BURNETT

I AM KEPT IN THIS PLACE AS A PRISONER. I have lost track of exactly how long I've been held here. But that does not very much matter. I am treated well and persons attend to my wants with courteous regu-

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larity and precision. What I fail to get is understanding. For the Spanish are a peculiar people; I doubt if they understand themselves—least of all me.

I am not a Spaniard, either, but was born in America. Though perhaps I am not wholly an American; maybe there is something other in me, something Russian, wilder, clearer. I do not know. But now and then, although I am still a young man, I have been able to see with a sharper clarity of vision than any others I have known, with a curious almost Fourth Dimensional eye. And I sometimes think that all the world is one great diseased mind, and only occasionally does an individual free himself from the compass of its illusions.

But this is aimless speculation. And not my story. For I want now to relate my experience, which has no duplicate in modern times.

It began in Toledo. Of that I'm quite sure. For, with my companion, an artist seeking picturesque spots for illustrative sketches, I had been in Spain not much longer than a week. From the French border, through Barcelona and Madrid, we had gone directly there, you see, seeking in the old towers and gates and castles bordering the Tajo some quickening of our feelings for all Spain.

And the events I am to tell of occurred on the night of the *gran baile mascara,* for which the town, on the day of our arrival, was garlanded, expectant, tense, and alive.

Yet, perched on the top of an eminence overlooking the muddy curling snake of the river that swirls about its base on three steep rocky sides, Toledo affected me oddly as we passed through its gates; and when I stepped from the conveyance that had brought us from the station, it was as if I had stepped into a kind of walled-up cage.

But the sensation was very momentary and quickly dispelled in the noisy, moving bustle of the crowds in the old *plaza de Zocodover,* which was filling with its sauntering crowds of Spaniards who turn out to stroll and smile and amble along just before dusk each day.

As my friend, an Italian, was negotiating for rooms, I stood outside to watch the people: cadets in their bright infantry uniforms, *guardias civiles* in their dark blue capes trimmed with the blood-red dear to Spain; the old shriveled men and women of other times and other generations; beshawled crones with sinewy faces and wide swinging skirts; noisy, carnival-spirited boys with masks or blackened faces; blanket-carrying peasants; basket-laden matrons and maids with great water-filled earthen *botijas.*

One old man—not, indeed, so very old—impressed me singularly. Dressed in a blanket cape of black, which he held around his chest with one bony hand, frayed of boot and with a battered hat cocked over his left eye, he turned on me a fleeting, curious, bearded face, and passed on. His features were caught in a semibuoyant mood, his crooked brow and sharp brown eye and great descending bulbous nose all combined with a general air to make him seem strangely unreal and realistic at the same time.

My friend came out of the little hotel.

"Complet," he said. "Rooms all taken for the ball to night."

I hardly heard him.

"Just now," I said, "I have seen Menipo."

"Menipo?"

"Yes," I answered. "By Velasquez."

"Oh," he said, "Toledo is full of types. A person could spend a year here and never do them justice. You mean the old fellow, full length, in the panel that always seems to companion Velasquez's Aesop? Marvelous type!"

We went to another hotel. Also full. We were referred then to a smaller place, a *posada,* "for man and beast," and in a short time we had engaged two *habitaciones* in the Posada de la Sangre on the Calle de Cervantes, through the Arco de la Sangre off the public square and almost in the shadow of the great murderous-spired fortress of the Alcazar.

Although by this time it was late twilight, there was still a fair amount of visibility and my friend, throwing down his bags in his room, left the *posada* at once with his portfolio under his arm, planning, as was his custom, to make a quick survey of the locality at once so that in the morning, with better light, he might go directly to his subject.

And I was left alone in the ancient inn.

From the Zocodover I could hear the blended noise of the crowds of Toledanos, whose gay spirits were quickening with the approach of night. Across the narrow *calle,* a light had appeared in a window, and inside I could see a Spanish woman sitting in a corner sewing on a huge white cloth, unmarked and immaculate as a shroud. Her face was full of character, lined and reminiscent of life. Her silent, steady needle plying fascinated me, and I stood watching her from my darkened little room a long time before turning on my light (for this Fourteenth Century hostelry, remodeled since the days of Cervantes and his squire and serf, boasted at least this much of modern convenience).

Tired as I was from the railroad journey from Madrid, my mind was far from fatigued, and as I lay resting on the bed, scrutinizing my narrow little whitewashed room, whose red flagstones, worn by generations, sloped weirdly to the door and to the balcony overlooking the *patio,* I was suddenly moved by a great desire to enter into the spirit and activity of the town while in Toledo, to know these people, or at least to be with and a part of them.

What better opportunity could have been made to my order, I thought, than this very night, when all the town is masked and festive for the *gran baile mascara?*

I was stirred by the thought and hurriedly washing and brushing up, I decided to purchase a costume at once and make ready for the ball, which was to be held, the announcements said, in the Teatro de la Rojas.

I tugged at the huge old-fashioned lock on my door, which yielded with irritating reluctance only after I put in the tremendous key upside down and turned it backward to disengage the latch.

I must describe briefly the Posada of the Blood of Christ, for it struck me so forcibly as a madhouse of architecture, or, more exactly, as a sane house that, through the weary acquiring of years, had fallen into architectural senility and despair. Its rooms, all narrow and cell-like as my own, were built three stories high around an open air court below, upon whose cobblestones were employed the cluttery old carts and wagons of the guests, mostly peasants and out-of-townsmen. To the south, and off the main court, were the stables for the mules, the patient *burros* of Spain, and from these quarters came the strong and piercing smell of wet straw and manure.

Above me were the now clear stars, shining in a sky more deeply blue than the depths of a grottoed sea. A little light beside a water trough in the *patio* threw shadows behind the antique columns supporting the balcony and made a few old benches lifelike as recumbent sleepers. Standing at the north balcony of the court, I was surprised at the angle of the floor I stood on; it sloped almost precariously to the wobbly pillars, and I smiled at the thought that not even the strongest *vino de Jerez* such as we had had at a cafe before entering the *posada* could have induced such reckless equilibrium in my mind.

Here had Cervantes stayed in 16-something, and written his "Novelas Ejamplares," centered in the square outside. Had he indeed, I wondered? Was this house then so sloped, so fallen in at the roof, so weak at the knees? Doubtless not.

I stood musing, watching the walls around the *patio,* absorbing the unusual silence and black desertion of the place and staring at the opposite side of the balcony whose death-white surface was ribbed vertically with the shadows of the upright balcony railing . . .

"I could go," I thought, "as a matador. But everyone goes like that. And there are so many masked balls always in Spain. Something different, now . . . A pirate? Old-fashioned. A clown? Pierrot? A peasant? . . . How unimaginative the mind is," I concluded, "in a new situation."

I shrugged and walked along the western side of the balcony to the doorway leading to the ground floor. I will wait and see, I decided, what I can find at a costumer's.

At the last step but one, the curious revelatory idea that is essential in an understanding of my plight, occurred to me.

"Go," said something deep inside me, "as Menipo!"

"I will," I said.

And, as if by some strange affiliation of will and chance, I walked straight to the water trough near the doorway leading into the stables and took down from a huge spike a great, dark-hued blanket-coat that hung there, threw it round my shoulders, and pulled over my head some unknown owner's cold-banded hat.

I lacked now only a beard to be as Menipo.

I was exhilarated so disguised, suddenly, strangely let out of my self, in a manner none may understand except those who have experienced it.

As I stood at the entrance to the stables, which looked through the *patio* and out into the Calles de Cervantes, my mind was divided between the necessity of a beard for my disguise and with contemplation of the sudden activity in the street outside.

From the Gobierno Militar, passing up the narrow aisle-like *calles*, *guardias civiles,* in their great capes were moving in strange groups westward to the Arco de la Sangre that entered onto the Plaza. There was nothing so strange in their going there, but it seemed that either they too were affected by the *mascara* spirit, or that something was wrong with my eyesight, for these usually so precise and dignified police servants were beyond all dignity now and lurched and swung along with an abandon I had never seen before.

Three or four of them, appearing at intervals, even made light of their stature, apparently ridiculing the very build that had assured them a government post in Spain, for they had bent their knees nearly to the ground and were waddling away, their legs hidden under their capes so that they appeared like absurd dwarfs beside the others.

I could not help laughing as I stood there, safely protected from conspicuousness by my own new trappings. I walked across the court to the outer doorway, and at that instant, from the Zocodover, came the sudden strains of band music, which drew more and more people through the channel of the street and thence through the arch and into the hidden crowds.

Behind me passed some peasants from the interior of the *posada;* but I did not turn around. A second or two later I saw even the proprietor himself, with his apron around his middle, go up the street. I then looked behind me, and found myself almost dreadfully conscious of complete isolation.

But, as I stared into the shadows behind me, I discerned one significant dark shape. It was a man. He was emerging from the stables. Wrapped like myself in a blanket cape, he came with appalling slowness toward me, slowly but directly, inevitably, like a heavily looming mountain.

Fearful that he might bump into me, I decided to step out into the doorway. His slow determined stride came on. There was no avoiding a collision. His face was down, hidden by the angle of his hat. A weighty oppressiveness settled on me. He was assuredly bound to walk right over me. I could not move.

With great effort, I stepped, at last, to one side. But he did not pass. He lifted his head, and I saw the features of the man with the crooked brow and the great descending nose. It was Menipo.

"Buenos," I mumbled in greeting, and was for leaving.

He made no response.

Instead, he walked closer toward me until he was so near I felt his breath in my face. Then, muttering words or sounds I could not understand, he pushed me backward, slowly, grossly, with his bent arm beneath his cape elbowing at my stomach.

Backward I moved, unable, through surprise or something else, to offer any resistance. Farther and farther back I went, away from the door and into the shadows of the frightful court.

After a century of time, it seemed, I found my tongue and what few Spanish words I knew that I hoped would cover the situation.

"What do you want?" I cried. "Stop this!"

He laughed, mumbled, and then talked, in a disordered, broken, high-pitched voice that rasped and scratched my ears. The man, I was convinced, was mad.

Could I offer him money, I wondered.

I made out one word here and there. And then:

"Pasaporte!" he said.

It was now my turn to laugh, if I had had the courage. *Pasaporte!* Passport, indeed. He was like the multitudinous officials that board the trains in and out of Madrid, seemingly at random, to scrutinize the documents of the entrants. This was Spain. The man was an official? Possibly. But where his uniform? The Spanish are a funny people . . .

My mind began to lag in thoughts, my body to fail to function quickly as I continued to back and back like a tired horse.

He was no official. He was a madman, and my very life in danger. I should spring at his throat, I thought. I should kill him, lest he kill me.

I looked sidewise, hopefully, into the street. Deserted as the court. I was helpless. I had no weapon. What lay behind his own great coat, I could not tell.

Then, stumbling on a cobblestone, I fell backward on the uneven flooring and struck my head an astounding blow on the stones.

Fortunately, however, I did not lose consciousness, for I remember that even in falling I had the presence of mind to cry for help.

And I added, too, "A madman, madman! *Loco, loco!*"

That I did not lose consciousness was apparent to me as soon as I fell, for looking up from the cold stones at the man above me, I could see at his elbow something I had not observed before. He was standing near the outer entrance to the court, beside a little wall shelf, on which reposed an open ledger and beside it a bottle of ink and a couple of pens.

I remember, too, that this seemed unusual to me, almost as if the book were an American hotel register, and thus quite out of place in Spain where the guests must fill out little slips for the police instead of merely signing their names on the book. Beside the ink bottle there were three other objects. A hammer. A hatchet. And a small yellow wooden barrel I assumed to be filled with tacks.

I took these objects into my mind in a glance. As I did, my frightful torturer picked up the hammer and the hatchet. I saw the keen blade shining in the dim light, and I felt as one must feel who stands on the edge of his own death.

If I could divert this maniac's attention—But how? My mind strove like a tugging animal.

"The tacks!" I screamed. "The tacks!"

He turned his bearded face to peer at the stand. Then he took from the tiny barrel one of the tacks. My plan was working! Renewed strength came into me, almost enough to enable me to lift my head. But not enough, it seemed. I sank back on the stones, beside the smelly bristles of some dirty straw.

But his simple child's mind was occupied. I was glad. Perhaps he would spend time trying to drive these tacks, diverting his attention from me. And my cry for help would bring me aid. But when? Why did no one come?

I listened, terrified, for some friendly sound in the street, some footfall in the house. But no sound came from the gloomy inn, none from the town but the misplaced music of the distant band in the Zocodover. These crazy Spaniards, with their *fiestas!*

He scrutinized the tack in his hand. He weighed it carefully and then pinched it in two fingers and lifted the hatchet in his right hand. Above the tack it poised an instant, and then descended.

No brittle metal sound came

back. The tack bounced away and fell beside me, soundless, springing back weirdly into the air, and then was lost again on the ground where I lay.

The tacks were rubber!

I knew the tacks were rubber by no unusual faculty of mind. Who has not seen those insane products of the notion stores of America: ink blots made out of black celluloid to sell to juvenile minds, cigars that explode when half smoked, imitation flies to pin on one's lapel and amuse one's friends? Rubber tacks!

Betrayed as I was by this heinous trick of fate, I sensed then the utter uselessness of living further. Why not capitulate? Why not—for a tack's sake as for a woman's, or a country's, or a people's, for art's sake, Menipo's, or for God's?

But it was strange withal, I mused, that they were really rubber tacks. Before I had reasoned out an action, I found I was on my feet beside the madman, absorbed with him in examination of these important objects.

He threw down the hatchet. It clattered on the stones. Then he tried to hit a tack with the hammer.

The tack bounced away, and then, reaching again into the small barrel, I saw him draw out of it half a dozen six-inch spikes, glistening with true steel. These were no rubber counterfeits. And then, ending all child's play at the shelf, he came to me, hammer in one hand, and these cruel crucifixion nails glistening in the other.

"Now you," he said. *"Su cabeza! Su corazon!"*

I got that much. My head whirled with the pain of my fall and with the excitement and fear of my plight. He was going to drive these nails into my head, into my heart! I knew this as well as if he had said it a dozen times. From his eyes to mine danced a message of terror that drained me of my reason, caution, hope, and courage.

I crouched. I lay down. Flattened myself, as before, on my back. If I could worm away, I thought, from this towering oppressor! My hand touched the hatchet, and I hurled it with the crying speed of a cyclone.

It struck his head and the blood came. Rich and red as the Spanish flag, deep-hued as bull's blood on a black hide.

And then occurred what frightens me now, but did not then.

I had not killed Menipo. He reached for the hatchet, fallen again on the floor. But when he lifted his head, I saw then a great change in the maniac.

Though blood was on his face, and his hair and beard were tangled in a wildness, unearthly and mad, there was a new clarity in his eyes. He looked at the hatchet in his hands with wonder and then down at me.

Now, I thought, it is over. With calm precision he will slay me, hammering my head into the cobblestones. But I still have a voice. Ten seconds may save me.

"Loco, loco!" I shouted. "Help!"

And at that moment help arrived. I saw the white movement of the proprietor's apron as he turned the corner street to the doorway.

But the madman had seen the movement, too. And on my chest I felt the hatchet fall. My fingers clutched it hopefully.

"Who called out?" roared the heavy-voiced proprietor. "Who is a madman here?"

Who, indeed? I could not lift my head. Much time must certainly have passed with that great giant looming over me. I felt strangely relaxed, almost at home resting on the floor, like a worm, like a dog, smelling, with only half my consciousness, the ground, the chill stone and straw.

I lacked a beard, though, I recalled. That was it. If I had had the beard when starting out . . . I clutched at the straw on the floor and tucked some under my chin. At a *mascara,* you know, it is the quaintness that attracts. And one must be imaginative.

I looked up.

"Who," cried the proprietor, "started this? Who is crazy here?"

I could not answer him in words that he would know. My Spanish took queer turns and starts. I mumbled all the tongues I knew.

And then I heard a voice by the register shelf that was like the voice of myself, calm and well-poised as when I order dinner in a great place. And the voice was that of Menipo, the madman.

"There," he was saying, "is the madman. He is crazy—see him on the floor there, like a dog. I was passing by, on my way to the *gran baile mascara,* when the dog there sprang upon me with a hatchet. Look at my cheek here. Call a guard, and lock him safe in jail."

This is what I heard. Everyone heard it. Could I deny it?

I clutched the proprietor's apron.

"Look," I said, "at my beard here. *I* am the real Menipo. How could I have hurt that thing? He is a picture by Velasquez. You are idiots. You are all mad!"

And so they are—though no one will see this but myself.

THE THIEF ON THE CHAMPS ELYSEES

by HALLIE BURNETT

STANDING BEFORE THE KIOSK WAITing for a copy of *l'Express,* I suddenly felt my big leather handbag weightless as an empty pillowcase, and I did not have to look inside to know I had been robbed by the girl in the *Prisunic.*

My first impulse was to cry out to

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the *agent de police* standing like a giant gull flapping his cape wings at the turbulent six o'clock traffic from his island on the Champs Elysees. But by the time I had taken a step forward, he had blown his whistle at a stalled motorist and had begun to shout such invective that, naturally, I reconsidered. A man too deep in any role does not care to be interrupted; it was doubtful, anyway, if he would consider a petty crime in a French five-and-dime store of any great importance.

There was a second, younger *agent* watching like an understudy from a window of a stationary police car, but seeing his concentration, I knew that to neither of them could I give way to hysteria. So I turned back to the kiosk, handed over the one franc for my newspapers (leaving only four new francs in my change purse), then spent another twenty-five centimes for *Le Figaro.* But my poise vanished the moment this last coin left my hand and I raced back to the corner entrance of the *Prisunic.*

The doorway now was blocked by two dogs and a crowd of shoppers hilariously observing the somewhat distracted attempts of a large proletarian mongrel and a small aristocratic white poodle to mate. It was only when the mongrel was dragged away by the nervous lad who was his master that the mistress of the elegant poodle managed to restrain her little bitch; but still the public remained to laugh and discuss *l'affaire* with the poodle's mistress, a cunningly designed bitch herself, in white wool and pink makeup.

"Naughty, naughty," she cried and wagged her own white *derriere* in unison with her pet's as though she herself had felt the challenge of the attack.

"Excuse, please. *Excusez-moi!*" I pleaded, pushing against the crowd. Resentfully they let me through, their faces plainly saying, Here is another American tourist possessed of not a shred of feeling for the most amusing facts of life.

As it was only by pushing and struggling that I got through to the counter where, the moment before, I had been trying on a cheap ridiculous hat, I refused to be intimidated by the crowd. Yet the *vendeuse,* once I had attracted her attention, stared as though she had never seen me, and for a moment this took all courage from me.

"Didn't you see the German girl?" I cried, breaking in on another customer. "The one next to me a moment ago? When I tried on these hats? Did you see her leave? Do you know which way she went?" I speak an American French, it is true, but surely she understood.

Handing a straw cloche to the customer, she retorted, *"Je ne comprends pas!"* I was ordinarily a coward before antagonism and I trembled, but did not retreat.

"I no understan'," the German

girl had said to me in English—but that was before she had asked, "You do not find a hat you like?" with so little accent that I thought she was a fellow American presuming on our nationality; also I had not cared for the way she was crowding up against me.

Then I turned and saw the foreign look. Although her soiled blonde hair was cut in the same style as mine, it was clinging moistly to a broad square forehead; and while the skin was young, it was marred by imperfections, as though she did not eat regularly or well.

Yet there was also a familiarity about the face which puzzled me. Had I perhaps seen her at the Ecole Francaise (she had seemed to know me by sight), or did she resemble some person I had known in the past?

I recalled that a traveling American must be friendly with all strangers, so I managed a distant but polite smile, at the same time drawing away from the touch of the girl's heavy coat against my bare arm—after all, it was a warm day in early September.

"The head sizes are too small for me," I replied, an admission which sometimes sounds boastful but always makes me think a cow's head is larger than a monkey's.

The girl disappeared, but to my surprise she reappeared at my right side. And she looked at me coldly then as though she'd not been the one to speak first and could not now imagine why I spoke to her at all!

"I no understan'," she said, with such a marked, guttural accent I wondered if I had been mistaken, if it had been someone else who had spoken before. And then the next instant, like a whitecapped wave dissolved by the swell of the sea, the girl vanished into the crowd, having extracted my passport folder from the handbag over my left arm.

"I've been robbed," I tried to say calmly to the saleswoman. I leaned across the counter to bring my words closer and clearer to her, for I could not allow her to ignore me. "The girl who stood here a moment ago—you saw her! You spoke to her and to me."

The *vendeuse* shrugged and coolly turned to rearrange her hats on the shelves as though the subject were closed—as though the girl I had spoken of, so far as she remembered this day or any other, had never existed.

Nervous tears rose in my eyes and turning quickly I knocked my frail paper bag, filled with objects I'd bought, against the counter, where it broke. (So many things which should be strong in France are frail, like paper bags, and things thought to be weak are granite, like this woman.) My small gifts for friends scattered like hailstones—the cans of goose liver and pork pate, the glass beads, pink soap, scarves, and perfume bottles with flower-trimmed necks, rolled, cluttered, fluttered, or crashed into the aisle, and one passing Frenchwoman was hit on the foot by a perfume vial in the shape of a pig.

I stooped to retrieve the nearest articles, thrusting these into my empty handbag (where my passport folder had been the hour before), then retreated into the crowd to lean against a counter where the red, blue, green, and yellow hats whirled into a spectrum of indistinguishable colors before my eyes.

I had not gone back to my French class on the left Bank that afternoon after the fitting of my Chantilly lace dress at Mlle. Boucicault's on the Boulevard Haussmann—I had felt too elevated by my glorified appearance in the dark mirror to settle down to another daily battle of French verbs in company with other accents as bad as my own.

There, in the dim room where the little seamstress strained her eyes, I had seen myself as I could be: my square brow almost distinguished-looking, my dark blonde hair Rapunzelian, and my full face luminous as a photograph of the Princess d'X in the last issue of *Realite;* so I rebelled. However, like many rebels, I had no cause, so the best thing I could think of was to go to a movie on the Champs Elysees.

Then, since the black lace gown was costing me twenty dollars more than I'd put aside for it, I passed up a film I wanted to see for a grade B picture made for French consumption only (there being a difference of four new francs between the two), and the dialogue in this was incomprehensible, the plot confused, and the setting regional.

I had walked out before the end with still an hour of freedom before I was expected back at the Pension for the evening meal, when I noticed the *Prisunic* doors were still open and I decided this was an unexpected opportunity to purchase small gifts to take back home.

My loose change was quickly gone, and it was necessary to take out the passport folder where I kept large bills—with my American Express Travelling Cheques, my SAS plane ticket, vaccination certificate, and other personal papers. Unfortunately, in order to remove one ten franc note, I had to expose all, including the green end of my American passport; and while this had never bothered me before, that moment I felt a curious sense of impending danger.

I could not reasonably explain this, nor can I now, yet it was as though some magnetic force were drawing that folder from my hands; and the sensation was so physical and so intense that after I had replaced the folder my arm actually ached. I recall rubbing my shoulder in alarm as though the strain had drawn heavily on the muscles of my heart, and then, as now, it seemed that I might faint . . .

Now again, a weakness came over me, and I fell into that pit of clairvoyance where the sense of danger is as staggering as a drop from a precipice in a dream. So I understood quite clearly that by the time I'd put my folder out of sight it had already, in effect, been stolen by a thief in the *Prisunic*.

The weakness passed and anger returned as I opened my eyes on the increasing disorder of the milling French crowd with the dinner hour beginning to stir their bellies and their temper. My impulse was now to get away, let it go, make out the best I could; but I thought if only someone would help me, I might still be able to find the German girl and force her to return my passport folder. After all, I was in a bad way without it.

"Where does one find the manager?" I asked another saleswoman, but since she was concluding a sale and I had made her lose count of the change, she too stared in resentment. Then someone directed me to a long white basement passageway in the rear, and turning my back on the crowd I entered on a stretch of white walls and utter, unexpected silence in a passageway that must have tunneled far back under a city block.

Here was no visible exit other than the way I had come—the three doors I passed, running down the corridor, seemed closed and locked forever; but at the far end where I made a turn to the left I found a heavy door bolted like a vault.

There was a smell of dryness now as from a well-stoked furnace and it seemed to me this might have been a gas chamber in the days of the Nazi Occupation; certainly I had been misdirected, so I turned and ran quickly back, down the white hall until, seeing one of the three doors open, I paused and looked inside to meet the eyes of a man standing over a white porcelain urinal. For one awful instant we both stared, unable to break the lock of mutual horror, then I fled through the door and out into the street.

The *agent* in the police car was now facing the other way, dreaming over orange umbrellas spread open like exotic fruits above the green tables of a cafe, but as I faced him his eyes turned and examined me with mild interest.

"A thief! *Une voleuse!*" I cried. "*Monsieur, s'il vous plait*—I have been robbed in the *Prisunic!*"

He jumped out of his car, spoke rapidly to the officer on the safety island, and then entered the store with me. There he asked questions so imperiously that in spite of the same blank stares as before, I was charmed and encouraged by his authority. And the hat saleswoman, this time, was not so indifferent, even though she still denied having seen anyone beside me at the counter in the past hour. There had been only one *etrangere,* she insisted, since noon: this one—pointing to me.

Like searching for a pebble on a rocky shore when the tide has come and gone, we wandered from counter to counter until the female manager appeared from the depths to pronounce any theft here *impossible*. If Mam'selle would only produce the proof, she said, or perhaps if I looked again in my bag, I would find the object which I thought I had lost.

"I did not lose anything," I said firmly. "My passport folder with my identification, my money—everything I own—was stolen in this store. I only wish help in finding the German girl who stood beside me." I pointed out the saleswoman. "It seems very strange that *she* will not admit this."

The manager continued to shake her head as other customers gathered around, and some were friendly to me, a stranger in trouble, and some were not, seeing I was American. But the young policeman stood steady and unflinching as a rock, coming back again and again with his sharp, hard questions; then we were again on the street, the store closing for the night, and nothing had been accomplished.

I waited beside my defender as he consulted a new, small book. *"Le Commissariat.* Ah," he murmured, his finger moving down the pages, then all at once I understood he must be very new in the service, or he would not be so eager to help, and so uninformed. His uniform too was fresh, new, unwrinkled, his shoes and belt highly polished; then, as I watched, his hard round chin puckered, his Norman blue eyes brightened, and even his tan mustache lifted with a charming smile.

Moistening his red lips, he showed me what he had been looking for in the book. "We go there!" he said, and we set off together on the rue Balzac where he made a sharp left into the rue Lord Byron, and then a sharp right, like an excited schoolboy in search of a darting squirrel. Tonight he would no doubt return to his parents (I decided he was too young and thoughtless for wife and child) who would listen to his prattle about an American woman who had carried in her handbag as much money as a Frenchman spends in a year for his wine; and then I caught the eye of a passerby and understood that I myself could seem to be a criminal, dragged along by the police!

Once again I had the impulse to bolt, but by then it was too late. Unexpectedly my policeman asked, with some concern, *"Ca va bien?"* And my face must surely have been a mess, red and soiled, with my hair hanging limp as the German thief's across her forehead.

"Ca va," I replied crossly, but then he moved to the outer edge of the walk and motioned me on ahead, apparently deciding at last

that it was safe to be more agreeable. After that we walked along as equals, talking of this thing that had happened to me, he even understanding my French, and I—since he spoke with peasant slowness—understanding his.

The accidental meeting of our eyes was so agreeable that by the time we reached the Commissariat on the Faubourg-du-Roule in the 8th Arrondissement we were remarkably at ease with one another, so that my protector introduced me to the elder of the two officers as tenderly as though we had been in love.

Now, with gallantry, my officer began our story, and I was pleased that he told it so well, encouraged by his superiors who listened like elders sponsoring a young man and delighted at his making good. The second official, however, had to leave for his dinner and rose, shaking hands with his colleague, nodding approvingly and encouragingly at my policeman, and at the door his eyes lingered a moment on my legs and this also seemed friendly and human. Then we got down to the business of the theft.

The Commissaire stated his passionate regret that I, an American guest in Paris, had been treated so badly, that I, a lovely lady, must understand that Paris was really not a lawless city—not like New York, which our own Mayor, interviewed last week by *France-Soir,* had admitted to be shockingly full of unsolved crimes.

At this moment a small and humble detective came in on my case, with a dog as nervy and tail-wagging as any stray along a country road, and although one could hardly take either of them seriously, the dog's tongue dripped with anticipation, his eyes glistened, and he pulled on the leash as though eager to get on with the chase.

I could not understand why they returned back through the door through which they had come—which could not possibly lead to the *Prisunic*—since I had been requested to give the dog a friendly sniff of my hand which held the bag.

I did not wish, however, to criticize Monsieur le Commissaire, who was certainly doing his best. Even now he was writing out a report for the American Embassy, a favor I had not thought of asking.

"They will be *tres, tres agite,*" he said. "A passport is taken seriously by your Government, Madame. And by ours," he added hastily.

Then he asked if I had enough francs for my dinner, putting his hand in his pocket, and I was touched by this, but explained that I was perhaps still expected at my Pension, late as it was. At that he himself telephoned Mlle. du Coeur, conversing with her in the polished manner she prefers, and when he bowed me away at last, it seemed as though we had met in social surroundings and only incidentally were in these drab police headquarters which, now that I thought about it, had the smell of frightful but detected crimes.

At the last moment my eyes met those of my policeman (whose name I never knew!), seeing his expression so regretful, his red lips so moist and his eyes so soft and brooding that it seemed that something profoundly emotional had been shared between us in this most exceptional hour of our intimacy. He even took a step toward me, impulsively, as a lover, wishing to keep me from leaving—but it was too fragile a thing between us, and the older man, sympathetically but firmly, reached out and put a restraining hand on his arm.

As I left I felt quite misty-eyed, and it was not until I found myself again on the darkening street, the lamps now lighted, that I remembered the thief herself had not, after my first description, been referred to by anyone again.

Back at the Pension I was greeted with excitement, and there was a small supper which Mlle. du Coeur had placed in my room, ham and cheese and an orange from Spain, with my own bottle of cold white wine, a clean napkin wrapped around its neck.

So when I went to bed at last I felt as comforted as a child after a storm of tears. It was not until much later, in my dreams, that I found the German girl beside me once more, somehow increasingly familiar, the same height as myself, although she had seemed less tall the hours before. And my sense of well-being vanished, so that I wept, awakening with a sense of loss more personal and disturbing than any I had ever known.

Light-heartedness briefly returned the next day when the Scandinavian Airlines gave me another ticket, and a Frenchman at the American Express office issued new Travellers cheques to me equal to those stolen with my passport.

"We may ask you later to identify any forgeries of your signature," he said, and I begged to be allowed to do this, to do anything to show my gratitude. I also suggested that the cheques be particularly watched for in Germany, since the thief had spoken with a German accent.

"Would you give me a brief description?" he asked, although I thought I had done this.

"She was about my height," I said, "and also my coloring. It is even possible that if we dressed alike she might somehow resemble me."

This I said on the impulse of the moment, for it had not occurred to me before. I could not understand why the young man seemed startled at what I said.

Then at the American Consulate I discovered the precarious balance of my situation, for I failed to be received with any friendliness at all.

"A lost passport," said the narrow-chinned, pale-lipped woman official, "places the guilt squarely on the loser, Mrs. Greenhill."

"But I did not lose it! Here is the report of the Commissioner of Police," I said, thrusting the document across her desk.

But the woman only looked at me with further dislike and touched the tip of a pointed tongue to her upper lip, shaking her head. "This only says that you reported your passport stolen. I fail to see any *proof*. I can only repeat, an American passport is not a thing to be treated lightly."

"I went to the police—and they believed me!" But I saw then I was being accused of something.

"Those Frenchmen can be fooled," she said briefly. "We cannot."

"I have my reservation to go home on Friday," I said, fighting for control. "I must have a passport —I cannot possibly stay in Paris any longer!"

"We are not a Welfare Agency," said the woman coldly.

"Everyone has been helpful," I protested. "Even the Commisioner of Police offered to lend me francs for my dinner." Yet when I saw the nasty look on her face I knew I had been foolish to say this.

"I doubt that an officer of the French Government would lend money to any woman—except at a price!" she said dryly, and I saw we were fighting the most primitive battle of all—the generosity of men toward one kind of woman and not to another.

"If I don't have my passport by Friday, I will lose my reservation and—perhaps more," I said quietly.

I could not tell her I was going home to be remarried to a man I had divorced, and that I could not now bear to wait another hour. She would have no more sympathy for that kind of nonsense than for any other. "Please—surely there is something you can do."

So, finally, perhaps trapped by my false humility, the woman told me to return on Wednesday. "With photos, and accompanied by someone to identify you. In the meantime—try to find your passport."

On Wednesday I went back with three photos and an acquaintance from the Pension who carried driver's license, insurance papers, personal mail, and an American library card: but alas, she had forgotten to bring her own passport, which was in her husband's coat pocket. The Assistant Consul became quite cheery when she discovered this and sent me away again empty-handed, saying to come back on Thursday.

But Thursday turned out to be a holiday, which I had not foreseen, nor perhaps, had she. So the acquaintance and I, who had hurried through breakfast in order to appear at 9:30, were turned away again. There had been rain in the night, and when we saw that it still looked threatening, the lady from the Pension decided to go right back to her room.

I found a small cafe a block from the Consulate and sat there over coffee, brooding. Who and what I was if I had been asked to prove my exitence at that moment, I did not know, for it seemed one could not exist without papers and the official approval of the baleful, cold-natured assistant lady consular employee.

But the thief, I thought suddenly, the German girl—how easy it must be now for her! All she has to say is: Here is *my* passport, *my* money, *my* checks, and she will be honored, while I, who can be identified only by my face, my bones, and my speech, am unaccepted, accused of not telling the truth.

But the thought of that girl intrigued me. Perhaps she has a lover, I thought, a Frenchman, and since Friday at six P.M. they must have spent many of those crisp decorative, new ten-franc notes. The girl also, surely, will have bought a new lighter coat and had her blonde hair washed. And if her lover *is* a Frenchman they will also have eaten good food and drunk fine wines, which even so soon as this may have improved the texture of her skin.

Yet I barely had money for this extra coffee, and the lace dress would have to be canceled, that pale transfigured face rising from the mirror of Mlle. Boucicault forgotten as though it had never been . . .

Feeling intense self-pity, seeing again that mirror which now reflected no image of myself at all, I was relieved when an American Army man I'd met the week before came by and sat down beside me. Listening to my unhappy story he, being a man of action, at once took charge. Even though it was a holiday, he got up from the table and telephoned a friend in the Embassy and stormed about my treatment, saying that if something was not done *toute suite,* he'd raise holy hell. If they gave me a runaround this time, I heard him say, "By George, we'll move in with the Army!"

Thus the next morning I was received quickly by the assistant lady consul, and although she found one last way of annoying me (my pictures were not acceptable and I must go to a photographer down the street who charged three times the ordinary fee), I stood before her at last, complete with all requirements. She looked at my witness's documents, she looked at the forms I had filled in, and she looked at my newest photo.

"This doesn't look like you," she complained, but now only as someone forced to accept irritating reality. And certainly the photo did not: with that harassed look on my face and my neglected blonde hair, I resembled more the German thief than I did myself!

Yet I managed to keep my tongue, even when she gave me a passport good for only six days, although I was laughing hysterically when I went, for the last time, out the Consulate door.

Back in New York at last, I remained grateful to the French policeman and the Commissaire, to Mlle. du Coeur, the Frenchman at the American Express, and to the Major of the American Army. I told the story several times about the unkindness of the American consul's assistant, and friends said I should write to my congressman or to the newspapers, which I never did.

I was remarried and happy, and was glad to put the whole thing out of my mind. Until one morning four months later, when a letter came from a Mr. Brown at the Express Company asking me to call and identify signatures on cheques I had reported lost in Paris.

Feeling oddly relieved that here at last was proof that I had been robbed, I telephoned and said I would be delighted to come down, although I hadn't really thought the cheques would ever be found.

"Why not?" Mr. Brown asked. I did not know, I said, although I supposed it was because of the German girl.

"Were you in Germany, then, Mrs. Greenhill? I understood you were only in France."

This seemed irrelevant, but I explained it was a German girl who had stolen them from my handbag in the *Prisunic*.

"I did not know that," he said. Somewhat hastily, I said I would be right down.

I was delayed by various duties so that it was three hours before I ascended the old-fashioned elevator and entered a room which seemed the sum total of all official rooms in the world. I'd been in quite a number since I'd started this search for my possessions—the police station in the Faubourg-du-Roule, the Express office in Paris, the Consulate, all cheerless, repelling blocks of granite challenge to unproved claims of humanity.

"I'm expected," I said to the girl at the switchboard, and a young man who stood halfway down the big room motioned to me. His face was reassuringly young, although blank and smooth, and expressionless eyes gave me a searching look of inspection before we sat down. Then he opened a folder on his desk and placed it on my lap.

"There are the checks, Mrs. Greenhill," he said. "Please examine them carefully. Tell me, if you can, which signatures are real and which are fraudulent."

"Zurich!" I exclaimed. "They speak German there—at least, I was not wrong about the girl's accent."

"All our checks are cleared through Zurich," he informed me, as though I had said something stupid. "Now, the signatures, please."

There was my name at the top of each check as I had signed it in my own bank and there was the counter-signature in the lower right-hand corner, also in my handwriting—small, impatient, too rapid for style, and too slanting, I have been told, for emotional stability. And all these signatures—there was no doubt about it—must be mine.

"They look all right," I said, thinking this was some trick to show me only my own signed cheques; then I counted them, and saw there were far too many here for that.

"Please look again, Mrs. Greenhill. This is a serious matter."

I picked up the cheques one by one, examining each letter, becoming so absorbed that I did not at once notice a woman who joined us. But when I looked up to say that it was still absurdly difficult to swear I had not written them all, she was looking over his shoulder with the same bright, observant, accusing smile I'd seen on the face of the woman assistant consul in Paris.

It was important that they understand, so I began to tell them all the circumstances of the theft. This thief on the Champs Elysees who had been so clever as to master my signature was a dull-looking creature as she'd stood beside me in the *Prisunic,* I said. So how could they explain this thing the German girl had done—mastering an imitation of my handwriting which had been shaped by my own three hundred years of American environment?

I went distractedly on, about the girl and me at opposite poles, and how she had stood there trying on a hat and watching me—but the *vendeuse* had claimed she remembered only one of us.

"Mrs. Greenhill, will you please, once more, describe this girl."

"Yes, of course." But suddenly I faltered, my face grew hot, and I found myself snapping the catch on my small city handbag. And although I needed a cigarette, I dared not reach for one, knowing that my hand would tremble.

For the truth was, I could not remember the face of the girl or evoke her in my mind. Even as I tried to say the words I had said before—blonde, my height, a wide, square forehead, round flushed face, brown eyes—it seemed I was describing not a stranger, but myself!

Then again it was as it had been in the *Prisunic*—when I was fighting for possession against a will strong enough to draw my life's blood, challenging my right to keep what was privately and exclusively my own. Now again, it seemed I was protecting something perhaps less tangible but of even greater value—my own belief in myself.

"The man at the Express office in Paris believed me, you know," I said wretchedly, seeing plainly enough what they all were thinking. "*He* did not once suggest I might have lost it—"

"Nor have we," said Mr. Brown, exchanging glances with the woman. "Even though there have been no other thefts reported in that district for a year."

"A year ago," said the woman, "a French woman with a red purse did a job in that store. Yet it is hard to see how a German girl could have escaped without attracting some attention."

There is no German girl, they seemed to say. Where is your proof? Here are the cheques you reported stolen and the others the foolish Frenchman in our office gave you—but the signatures, you see, are all the same.

Then unexpectedly Mr. Brown leaned forward and touched one finger to the smaller pile of travellers' cheques.

"Those are the forgeries, Mrs. Greenhill. You will observe the movement of the pen on the final letters, and how the 'r' is not quite the same. So there is nothing more we need ask of you at this moment—although since two are still missing we may call on you again. Thank you for coming in."

The trail was ended, and they meant for me to go. But this was not fair; I could see even then that they had not taken my word for all this, and I wanted to prove it to them, and to the policeman and the Commissaire who had looked so sad to have me leave—for they had not believed me, either: I understood that at last.

I was the only one who had seen the German girl, who could not now be properly described; yet she was still abroad in the world, still uncommitted and still free—my deadliest enemy, who had stolen my money, my passport, and my face.

EDITORS' NOTE: For a detailed history of *Story*—a fascinating and heart-rending history—we suggest that you read the Foreword and appendix notes ("A Chronological Memo on *Story* Magazine") in STORY JUBILEE, edited by Whit and Hallie Burnett—a collection of 50 short stories representing "the best of the best" from *Story* . . . STORY JUBILEE was published early in 1965 by Doubleday & Company, Inc.

If you have read Florence V. Mayberry's two previous stories in EQMM ("The Motion Picture in Mrs. Leister's Mind," issue of February 1964, and "Out of the Dream Stumbling," issue of May 1964), you won't want to miss her newest strange and haunting tale—again, a fascinating exploration into a woman's heart and mind . . . Indeed, speaking for ourselves, we wouldn't want to miss any story Florence Mayberry writes.

A LILY IN CHRISSY'S HAND

by FLORENCE V. MAYBERRY

IT ISN'T A NAME, YOU UNDERSTAND; it's only what I called him. Mr. Handsome. I never knew his name.

But Sid, now, I always knew Sid's name. Sidney Sherman. As soon as he began to work for my father, Daddy told me his name. Besides, Sid and I have been married eight years. I ought to know my husband's name, shouldn't I?

I barely met Mr. Handsome. Actually, I don't really know anyone in Reno. I've only been here five weeks. I came to divorce Sid. About this divorce, it bothers me. I never thought of a divorce until Sid kept saying, Chris, if you want children so much, why don't you divorce me; I'll never have children with you, Chris, so why don't you get a divorce?

But my father didn't want me divorced. About a week before my father died, I was listening at the library door one night while he was talking to Sid. Daddy said, "Sid, it's sewed up tight as a drum. You ever divorce Chris, you're out of the stores and a Board of Trustees will take over. But you be loyal to Chris and see that she's reasonably happy and in good health, and you stay head of the whole chain."

My father said exactly that. I remember things easy, just like a camera takes a picture. It's deciding things that's so hard, that makes my head hurt so much.

Well, when Sid kept talking about how I wanted a divorce, I said, "Sid, if I divorce you, you're out of the stores and a Board of Trustees will take over. I wouldn't want that to happen—it would make you sad and make Daddy mad."

He lifted his hand, as if he were going to slap me. "You little sneak," he said. "Don't you know not to listen at doors?"

He wouldn't have said that, or lifted his hand, two months earlier. Nell was alive then. She had been my nurse since my mother died when I was seven. But Nell died too, like my mother and father. Now Sadie is my maid. Sid got Sadie for me, and Sadie likes Sid better than she likes me.

Well, all right, about Mr. Handsome. He was standing on the Virginia Street bridge watching men fish. The skin of his face and in the V neck of his sweater was so brown and clean. It made me think of pines and snow and happiness—like up at Lake Arrowhead where Nell took me one winter.

I stopped behind him and stared. I said in my mind: you look around, you look around, I'm a pretty girl. Well, my father said I was; he said I'm a real Irish beauty with black hair and blue eyes—that's just what my father said.

As though I'd plucked him like a banjo, Mr. Handsome straightened. His shoulders shook themselves. He whirled around and looked right into my eyes. I smiled. He flushed and tried to look back at the river, but he couldn't. He turned back and stared at me.

You'd think after that he'd say something friendly. What he did say was, "Do I know you?" It hurt my feelings. My lip trembled. I didn't answer, and turned away toward the hotel.

He followed and touched my arm. "I'm sorry," he said. "Really, I didn't mean to be rude. It was just—you were looking as though I should know you—oh, I'm sorry, that's worse yet, isn't it?"

I looked at his eyes. They were large and gray. Sid's are slitty and dark, and Sid frowns a lot. Mr. Handsome's face was shaped like the one on a statue I once saw in Rome—Nell took me to Europe when I was eighteen.

I said, "You're a sweet handsome man, and I'm not mad at you any more. I'm lonely. Why don't you walk with me to the hotel? Sadie won't mind. Sadie said I ought to find a boy friend now that Sid and I are going to be divorced."

Because, you see, Sid's not going to be out of the stores if *I* get the divorce. Daddy's will doesn't say anything about *me* not getting the divorce. So Sid said I shouldn't worry, if I really wanted a divorce—why, just go ahead. And I'd rather go ahead and divorce Sid if he doesn't want any children. I would love to have lots and lots of children. I think about it all the time. I think how much fun the children and I could have playing together.

Besides, I thought if I got a divorce, then I could fire Sadie. I never liked Sadie. She has eyes like gooseberries, and her skin is an ugly blue-white with splotches, and when she smiles she looks as though she'd like to bite me. I want someone like Nell again. She never hurt me when she gave me my medicine. And I have to have medicine, so I won't get those spells.

Mr. Handsome leaned over and looked closely at me. "You're a strange one," he said.

My lip trembled again, and I bit it. "Well, I can't help that," I said. "Some people are born strange."

"Don't cry," he said. "Please. It's just that I never met anyone like you before."

"I'm special," I said. That's what Daddy always said to me. Suddenly it made me happy. To be like nobody else in the world! "Goodbye, Mr. Handsome," I said. "I'll see you later. Come visit me."

At the hotel the doorman tipped his big cowboy hat to me as I went in. "Mighty pretty day, and you make the day look prettier yet, Mrs. Sherman," he said.

I smiled—big lady, la-de-da! Ooh, I love to hear the nice things the doormen and bellhops tell me here. They all say I'm pretty. Sid never said I was pretty. He always kissed me on the forehead, and held me far off to do that. Like I gave him the shivers.

I hummed, but very softly, as I went up in the elevator. It was a song Nell used to sing to me. Sadie told me I had to stop singing in elevators. Why do people look funny when you sing in an elevator? Don't they understand that singing comforts the heart? Don't *they* ever sing?

After I got off the elevator I looked up and down the hall. Nobody was in it, so I began to sing real loud. Sadie sprang out of our apartment and yanked me in and shut the door.

"You want people to hear you—to *know?*" she asked. Her teeth were so tight together it was a wonder the words could get out. Her gooseberry eyes looked frozen. I slapped her. Hard. It made her white cheek splotchier than ever.

"To know what?" I asked.

She put her hand to her cheek and smiled. I saw a fox in a zoo smile that way once. Yes, I did, just like Sadie, and its eyes watched the people just the way Sadie watched me. "To know that you're different. Mrs. Sherman, other folks don't sing out loud in hotel hallways—maybe folks are sleeping."

I thought about this. I certainly didn't want to wake up people. But by noon they ought to be awake. While I was thinking, Sadie whirled around to do something. Then she whirled back to me and said, "Let's have one of your nice pills—now, that's a good girl. And let Sadie give you a nice hypo so you can nap before lunch. You took too long a walk this morning. You waited too long for your medicine."

She held the pill to my mouth, popped it in, and I took a swallow of water. Then I jumped on the sofa. I jumped up and down and yelled, *"I'll sing if I want to!"*

I sang. Sadie was still plunging around, with reddish-blue splotches on her cheeks and her jaw stuck out a foot. She came at me with the hypodermic needle. "Ooh, you want to play!" I said. I threw my arms around her waist and began to waltz her around. She's heavier than I am, but I'm strong. Once, before we came to Reno, I butted her in the stomach with my head and knocked her down.

Well, we danced and danced and she began to breathe hard and shove me. But when we came to the window I wanted to see if Mr. Handsome was still on the bridge, and I stopped to look out. The needle went *plunk!* into my arm.

Really, it was a relief. It's tiring to be keyed up so. Now that I knew I couldn't help getting quiet, I stood still, listening to my blood ease down.

"I'm not mad any more, Sadie," I finally said. "I'm beginning to float. I think I will float right out the window. I will float down to the bridge. Then I'll float down the river like a little boat, easy and happy like rock-abye-baby."

"Mrs. Sherman, hush that and come away from that window." Her voice sounded scared. Hah, I thought, you think I don't know why you're scared? Sid told you to be scared. You think I'm going to kill myself. Because my Daddy told Sid, that night I listened, "And Sidney, if my daughter dies in any way traceable to you, or if she commits suicide—and I would consider suicide traceable to your negligence—you're out, and the Board of Trustees takes over."

"Scaredy-cat, scaredy-cat," I said. But I didn't care any more. The ease was spreading in me.

Sadie followed me into my bedroom. I sat on the bed and she unfastened my dress. "Sadie," I said, "I met a man today. On the bridge. He looked like a statue Nell once showed to me. A brown Roman god."

"Well, honey, I told you, you ought to have yourself a little fun. Sadie'll give you some medicine and then if you take a half dose every couple of hours, you could go out and enjoy yourself."

"When I take medicine, I don't feel like fun," I said. "With medicine, I don't even care if I see Mr. Handsome again. Sadie, what am I doing in Reno?"

"You're divorcing Mr. Sherman," she said. She said it almost like humming, like something she had memorized. "You're angry because he won't have children, and you said you were going to find a husband who would. Remember?"

I remembered. It was a relief to be sure again.

I fell asleep and dreamed about Mr. Handsome. We were walking up a curving staircase. The staircase wasn't attached to anything. It started from nowhere and went nowhere.

"My heart's broken," I told Mr. Handsome. "Sid won't let me have babies and I'm lonely. Sid only kisses my forehead. So I'm getting a divorce. Will you marry me, Mr. Handsome?"

"This is just in your mind," he said, but in a kind voice like the way Daddy always talked. "And

Sadie and Sid say you have no mind."

"I do so," I said. "My mind is in little bottles with numbers on them. Sadie buys them and gives them to me, and then I'm like everybody else. Only, every time I take my medicine, I have a new mind. Wouldn't that be handy for a mother with lots of children?"

"You're beautiful," he said. "I would like you to be the mother of all my children."

The joy in me was like a white light. I looked at my hands and the joy shined right out of my flesh. "Oh, Mr. Handsome, show me your babies!" I just begged him.

"They're up there," he said, pointing up the staircase. As I ran up the stairs, they moved down, like an escalator. I stayed right where I was, but Mr. Handsome was going down—down—down—and then I couldn't see him any more. I tried to run down, but the stairs ran up—and when I ran up, the stairs ran down. To escape them I jumped off . . .

I was lying on the floor of my room. The window was over there. I got to my feet. My head whirled. I stumbled to the window.

My head hit the glass. The glass cracked but didn't break. Sadie came behind me, grabbed my shoulders, and flung me on the bed. She bit out some words—I couldn't hear what they were. She was panting and her gooseberry eyes looked—no, this time they were like fish eyes, staring, glassy fish eyes. She finally said, "You nut, what were you up to?"

It sounded so funny. Always before she called me Mrs. Sherman. You nut! I began to laugh. "I was just going out for some fresh air," I said.

She slapped me. Nobody had ever slapped me before. Not even Sid. I lay there, shocked. She moved her fat hands like lightning and shot another hypo into me. I shut my eyes. They filled up like little wells and spilled over.

Sadie was calling on the telephone beside my bed. She was calling Sid. She said, "Mr. Sherman, Mrs. Sherman just tried to jump out the window. I'm having a time, I can tell you."

Then she said, "One more week. She'll be able to get it in one more week." Then she said, "I think you'd better. It might steady her."

I went to sleep . . .

I woke up, dizzy, but with no headache. Sadie came in and said I should shower and she would order my lunch, that it was four o'clock. I didn't answer her.

I took my shower, dressed, and told Sadie she could throw the lunch in the garbage. I was going down to the dining room to eat where I could see somebody besides her.

She popped her eyes and asked, "You sure you feel all right?"

I just slammed the door.

After the food and coffee I felt

better. But I was still lonely, so I decided to go find Mr. Handsome. I would find him and tell on Sid and Sadie, and get rid of them.

I looked on the bridge. He wasn't there. I went to the Mapes Hotel. He wasn't in the gambling room or the lobby. I went to the fifteen cent store, into a restaurant. Then I went to the Post Office. Well, he was there. He was taking letters out of a box.

"Here I am," I said. "I told you I'd see you later."

He turned red. "Oh, hello," he said. He cleared his throat and turned to a pretty blonde girl standing beside him. "This is the girl I told you about, the girl on the bridge," he said.

She looked me up and down, cool, cool. "Dear, introduce me," she said like ice.

He was still red and he said to me, "This is Miss Adams, my fiancee. I don't know your name."

Like in the dream, I felt stairs going up, going down; up, down . . . "Are you ill?" Mr. Handsome asked.

As dignified as ever Daddy could have done I said, "I have spells. Will you please go away and leave me alone? I'm having one now."

So they stood to one side and watched me a minute, and then they went away.

I left the Post Office. I went across the bridge and down to the drug store for an ice cream soda. I cried while I drank it, but it made me feel better—ice cream sodas are very comforting.

Sadie found me there. "You'd better come back to the hotel," she said. "Mr. Sherman's office just called. Mr. Sherman's arriving by plane in another hour."

Really, it made me happy. After all, I've known Sid ten years. I've known him longer than anybody, now that Daddy and Nell are gone. Maybe he'd changed his mind about having children. Maybe I didn't want a divorce any more. And a kiss on the forehead is better than no kiss.

When Sid opened the door of our apartment, I ran and put my arms around his neck. I kissed him. On the mouth.

Sid frowned and looked over his shoulder, into the hallway. "Don't do that," he said. "After all, you're divorcing me."

"No, I'm not. I changed my mind," I said. "I'm not, I'm not!"

Sid made me sit down. He explained to me again how sad I was not to have children, how I wanted to be free, how it wasn't Sid who wanted to be free, it was me. He said, "Chrissy, you said so. Remember how you used to cry all the time? It was your idea, Chrissy. Remember?"

He made my head whirl trying to get it straight. Little threads puckered my backbone. Little worms crawled up and down my neck. I began to hum. Sometimes humming makes the crawling stop.

"I'm going to bed. I feel sick, you're making me feel sick. I'm glad I'm going to divorce you."

I ran into the bedroom and fell on the bed, on my stomach. Sadie followed and pushed the door open a little. Then she walked back to Sid and he began to talk to her, low. Finally the hall door creaked and I heard Sid say, "Well, see that she's as sane as possible until she gets the divorce. Give her those pills more often. If she shows up crazy in the courtroom, or does a flip-up before she gets there—my God, I've had it. I'm sick and tired baby-sitting a crazy woman."

I'm not crazy. My Daddy said I wasn't crazy. I heard him tell Sid that it was just spells that I had, and Sid said, I understand, sir, I understand.

"Help me," I whispered to the room. Lots of times there are people, and things, in rooms even when you can't see them.

"Oh, don't worry," Sid was saying to Sadie. "Be good to her and keep her sane, and you'll get a bonus. Let her show up crazy in that courtroom, and you get your salary, period."

"Help me!" I said. "Oh, God, I'm crazy, craz*eeee*!"

I meant to whisper. But it came out loud. Sid and Sadie ran in, Sadie reaching for the needle.

"Now, now, Chrissy," Sid said. He got in back of me and put his big arm around me and held my arms down. I tried to bite the back of his hand, but all I got was the tips of hairs in my teeth.

Sadie said, "Be a good girl, Mrs. Sherman, let Sadie ease you." The needle stung my arm. Sid let me free.

"Well," he said. "If she'll go to bed, she'll be good for a few hours."

I lay down on my bed, folded my hands on my breast, and laughed.

"You want I should rub your back?" Sadie asked.

"I want a lily," I said. "Put a lily in Chrissy's hand. Then I'll look dead. If I'm dead, I won't be crazy. If I'm dead, Sid won't worry—"

"Not much!" Sid said. "From here on, Sadie, you sleep in the living room. Leave the door between you and Mrs. Sherman open all the time, hear? I don't want any more window jumping."

"Put a lily in Chrissy's hand!" I yelled. It was hard to do. My lips were getting heavy.

"Go get her a damn lily!" Sid said. "There's a florist downstairs."

Sadie hurried out. Sid stood over me, watching me sing, "I want a lily, I want a lily!" My lips grew thicker and heavier. Sid began to blur. My eyes shut. But as they shut, I said to myself: don't go to sleep, that's what *they* want, they're mean, don't do a thing they want, make them sorry.

I opened my eyes a tiny bit. Sid was moving back, back. Then he left the room.

I pushed up on one elbow. Z-z-z-z-z, my head went. Wobbly.

It's hard to fight that medicine. I looked to see if Sadie had left the needle. She had. Believe me, I was going to make them sorry. Show them who could stick needles. I put the needle and the bottle of medicine for it under my pillow and turned out the bedlamp.

After a while I heard Sid say, "Well, she doesn't care now, go put it in a vase. She's out cold. I just looked. So don't go in there and take a chance on waking her. She won't touch the needle, she hates it. Now, if you need me, I'm in Room 614."

I made my eyes go open, shut, open, shut—like setting-up exercises. I sat up in bed, easy, easy; I lay back, easy, easy, so the bed wouldn't creak and bring that nasty Sadie in. I said poems under my breath, so I couldn't fall asleep.

Sadie moved around, moved around in the other rooms—I could hear her. The sofa creaked. She yawned big, and flounced. Open the eyes, shut the eyes, sit up, lie down, open, shut, sit, lie.

I heard a snore.

I put my feet on the floor. My head wanted to fall on the pillow. But if it did, it might break the hypodermic needle. I walked to the window and looked out.

Just street lights and the dark river beyond the street.

Mr. Handsome wasn't on the bridge. He wasn't anywhere. For me. Nobody would be anywhere, ever, for me. Sid said I was crazy.

I peeked past the door, into the living room. Sadie had left one lamp burning. She was lying on her back, with her mouth open. She had on all her clothes and a blanket over her. Mean old thing.

I tiptoed back to my bed, lifted the pillow, got the medicine and the needle. I filled the needle good and full. I'd been watching Sadie do it long enough, so it was easy. I took it into the living room.

But how could I do it? Sadie was all covered up. No legs, no arms, no bare skin.

Yes, there was. Bare as could be.

I jabbed the needle deep into the hollow of her throat and pushed the plunger. Fast. She gurgled, stiffened, threshed around. When I get excited, I'm *very* strong. She's heavy, but she couldn't do a thing. I held her down with my knee on her chest and kept the needle in her throat.

"Lie still, you bad, bad thing," I kept telling her.

Sadie moaned. Her eyes closed and she began to breathe hard. She was getting white around the mouth but her cheeks were purple-red. She stayed asleep—yes, indeedy, Miss Smarty.

There was blood on the hypodermic needle. I hate blood—ugh! So before I went to tell Sid I was not going to get a divorce, I washed the needle at the kitchen sink, dried it with tissues, and put it on the coffee table beside Sadie. Then I put on my shoes and went looking for

Room 614. My apartment was 527, so all I had to do was walk up one flight.

I knocked on Sid's door. After a minute Sid opened it. "Where's Sadie?" he asked, mad.

"She's bye-bye-sleepy-bye," I said. "And I'm never going to take any more medicine, I'm going to stay crazy. Hear? *Crazy!*"

"Come here," he said, softly, his teeth nibbling the words. He grabbed my arm, but I kicked his shin. He picked me up, walked fast down the hall and down the stairs. I began to laugh.

"Shut up!" he said. At my door he let me slip to the floor, turned the knob, then picked me up again and shoved me inside.

He saw Sadie on the sofa and ran to her. He shook her shoulders. "Sadie! What's the matter?"

He turned toward me, because I was laughing so hard. As he turned, he saw the needle. He picked it up. He leaned over Sadie and saw the bloody puncture in her throat.

"No!" he said, low and scared. "What have you done?"

It frightened me. The tone of his voice. I didn't do anything to Sadie that Sadie didn't do to me all the time. But his voice sounded so scary.

That was the first time I thought of doing what I did. It was just—well, there was Sid, and he'd been so mean, and everything was so handy.

I slipped behind Sid, shut my bedroom door, and propped a chair under the knob. I picked up the telephone receiver. Sid beat on the door. I told the operator, "Please call the police. I'm getting a divorce from my husband and he just hurt my maid and now he's banging on my bedroom door and he's going to hurt me. Hurry!"

I hung up and saw the medicine bottle. If they saw that bottle in my bedroom, they'd know I took the medicine and put it in the needle. I went to the window, opened it, and threw the bottle as far as I could. Across the street, down toward the darkness of the river. Then I shut the window.

The detectives and bellhops came and rescued me from Sid.

They took Sid away. To jail. And they took away poor mean old Sadie. The hospital telephoned a little while ago. They said Sadie died. She never woke up.

Well, I couldn't sleep. I couldn't find the pills Sadie always gave me and the hypodermic needle's gone. And in the dark, while I tried to sleep, Daddy and Nell kept telling me I did wrong, I did wrong.

I went down to the hotel desk and asked where I could find the Chief of Police. They said go down one block and then turn to the right.

So here I am, Mr. Chief, and that's the whole story, the whole true story, every bit of it, just the way it happened.

WHO'S MINDING THE STORE?

by MARGARET HILLERT

Little Bo-Peep has lost her sheep
And who's to help her find 'em
Before some butcher does 'em in
And then proceeds to grind 'em?

Alleyn is putting his boy to bed.
Gamadge is feeding his cat.
Campion's tutoring Lugg in French.
Selena is buying a hat.
Bond is out of the country now.
Shayne is pursuing a dancer.
Nero's tied up in his orchid room
And won't even bother to answer.
Ellery Queen has a deadline to meet.
Karmesin's telling lies.
Simon the Saint has a horse on his mind.
Little Poirot sits and sighs.
Dr. Coffee has gone for tea.
Holmes is playing his fiddle.
Perry and Della have just stepped out—
And who's going to solve the riddle?

Little Bo-Peep, forget your sheep,
Just save your pleas and appeals.
The sheep will come dragging their tails at last,
While the 'tecs are dragging their heels.

CALENDAR OF CRIME

The June story in CALENDAR OF CRIME . . . *about Helen Troy and her June wedding, and Ellery's "fancy big-brain stuff"* . . .

THE MEDICAL FINGER

by ELLERY QUEEN

IN WATCHING OVER THE SPECIAL INterests of women since early Roman times, the queen of heaven has had more names, shapes, and identities than the notorious Sophie Lang. As Caprotina, Juno was worshiped by female slaves. As Sospita, the savior, she was invoked by women in their perils. Under titles like Cinxia, Unxia, and Pronuba she played the leading role in the ritual of marriage; as Iuno Lucina, her protection was implored by occupants of the labor stools; and on the Matronalia the married ladies with their maiden daughters met at her temple in a grove on the Esquiline and made offerings. Also, not to be sentimental about it, Juno is found represented as a war goddess—a fine recognition by the ancients that, where the fairer sex is concerned, all is not moonlight and roses.

The animals sacred to her were the goose, which is silly; the peacock, which is beautiful; the cuckoo, which has a monotonous voice and lays its eggs in other birds' nests; and the serpent, whose nature is too well-known for indictment. She is the goddess of advice and of money—of all things peculiarly interesting to women; and, of course, ever since the hapless judgment of Paris, when—as Hera—Juno was outbribed by Aphrodite, she has been the most jealous and unforgiving of the deities.

In short, Juno is all things to all women, and that is why the poet Ovid has Juno say that the month of June was named in her honor—June being the season of the year most favorable to marriages. "Prosperity to the man and happiness to the maid when married in June" was a proverb in ancient Rome.

Multimillions of the sisterhood have put their maiden faith in it ever since, and the elder daughter of Richard K. Troy of Sutton Place and Palm Beach was no exception. She had always wanted a June wedding, and she got one—not quite, perhaps, as she had dreamed. But the calendar was right—she was

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dressed as a bride, and there was a ring; so the old saying came true, if only for a very short time.

Her father had named her Helen, for Richard K. Troy was that most dangerous of people, a practicing sentimentalist. To Mr. Troy, in the beginning was the word; and since he had an easy vocabulary and a cliché for everything, he had made his fortune in the greeting card business. His first child's name was a sentimental inspiration of his youth, and when Helen Troy grew to be a marvelously beautiful young woman, her father was not surprised; it was simply another proof, in the whole argument of his life, of the word made flesh.

He always regretted that he had not had the foresight to perform a similar service for his younger daughter Effie, the selection of whose name he had imprudently left to his wife. Mrs. Troy had leaned heavily toward propriety; and Euphemia, the dictionary told her, signified "of good report." Effie indeed grew up to be well spoken of, but the trouble was she entered conversations very seldom, being plain and always looking as if she were about to get down on all fours. Effie was Mr. Troy's cross.

But Helen was the apple of his eye—"the golden apple," he liked to say whimsically. "You'll remember that was the real reason the Trojan War was fought, haha!" Peaceable as he was, Mr. Troy said it not without a glow; an army of young men had fought over Helen from the time she was beginning to bud above the waist, and she arrived at Junoesque maturity by stepping lightly over a battlefield littered with bloodied noses and broken hearts.

Mr. Troy had a moment of uneasiness after Mrs. Troy died when Helen, the vigilant mother-eye finally lidded over, promptly trifled with the wrong kind of man. But Helen laughed and assured her father that she could handle the fellow, and Mr. Troy was fatuous enough to let the moment pass. That was a mistake.

Victor Luz was a chunky young European with sprouting black eyebrows and really formidable hands. They were the hands of a peasant and he was ashamed of them, because his father—who was attached to one of the United Nations delegations—came from a Louvre of aristocrats and had long slim golden fingers like women's cigarette holders.

Victor had come to the United States as a college student. At Princeton he had been persuaded to put his hands to use, and as he was agile and athletic, with a naturally lethal left hook, he had no difficulty making the boxing team. But intercollegiate competition brought out the depressing fact that when he was hurt, Luz forgot the rules and became a killing animal, gouging and punching wildly low and all but using his powerful teeth. In one bout he rolled to the mat with his opponent, a bewildered junior from Rutgers, and he was disqualified and dropped from the team.

But he was charming and handsome, with Continental manners and a great deal of money, and he was a social success from the moment he sublet a bachelor apartment on Park Avenue after his graduation. He made rare appearances at Lake Success, where he was known vaguely to have some connection with his country's delegation. But he was seen regularly at horse shows and hunt clubs and he was a favorite of café society—even being interviewed under his full name, which included a titular prefix, on the Stork Club television program by Sherman Billingsley himself.

Luz was introduced to the Troys by Henry Middleton Yates, who had known him at Princeton and now sold bonds for a Wall Street house. Yates had been in love with Helen Troy since his first crewcut. He was one of the warriors whose nose had been bloodied, but his heart remained intact; being a born bond salesman, Henry was undiscourageable. Long after most of his rivals had consoled themselves with lesser prizes, he was still in dogged pursuit of the Troy beauty.

Helen was fond of Henry; he was good-natured, good-looking, comfortably manageable, and he had just the right promise of static electricity; she might, in fact, have married him long before if the battle had still not warmed her blood a little—and . . . of course . . . her mother had approved, which she had not. Henry was aware of the two impediments to his happiness, but he was patient; he knew time would remove both of them. When Mrs. Troy died, Henry was ready. He threw Victor Luz at Helen.

Henry was a planner, and his plan depended on his knowledge of Helen and his shrewd appraisal of her state of mind. Adoration at arm's length would not satisfy her forever, and there were signs that the Trojan wars were palling. What she needed, he reasoned, was a final passage of arms, in which her appetite for conquest would be glutted.

Victor Luz, thought Henry, was just the man for the job. Luz could hardly fail to be smitten, and Helen would lead him on automatically. There was no danger that she would fall in love with him or that his name would tempt her to do something silly; Luz was too foreign for Helen's emotional tastes and she was too sensible to sell her freedom for a title. He would amuse her for a while; then she would drop him, expecting him to accept his dismissal, as the others had done, with a broken heart but a sporting smile.

What she would not know until it was too late was that Luz, when balked, forgot the rules. So he would be a bad loser, and the whole episode would end disagreeably.

Henry was sure such an experience at this period in Helen's life would drop her, finally and gratefully, into his lap.

And that was a mistake also, even though it all came to pass exactly as Henry hoped.

He brought Victor Luz to the Troy house, Luz was enchanted, Helen was interested, they began to see a great deal of each other, Luz pressed an ardent courtship, Helen played with him until her interest dribbled away, she broke it off—and Luz hung on.

Helen looked at him then really for the first time. There was something alarming in the quality of his persistence, the quivering intensity of a sealed tank building up a pressure. He did not hang on like a gentleman, unobtrusively. He took to following her, threatening her escorts with violence, sending her hysterical notes, hounding her on the telephone, proposing suicide pacts, weeping on the garden wall outside her bedroom window, jumping out at her from doorways in broad daylight and falling at her feet.

The climax came one night at El Morocco, when Luz made a scene so outrageous and humiliating that Helen fled in tears—into Henry Middleton Yates's arms. As far as Henry Middleton Yates was concerned, that was the end of the play. Unfortunately, Victor Luz was following a script of his own.

The morning after the scandalous scene in the night club, Richard K. Troy was peacefully finishing his decaffeinized coffee when his younger daughter, Euphemia, came in and said with unfamiliar vivacity, "Victor Luz is in the library asking for you."

"That fellow?" said Mr. Troy, frowning. "What's he want?"

"I don't know, Father," said Effie. "But he looks awfully stiff and correct. Maybe he wants to apologize for last night."

"I suppose I ought to punch him in the nose," said her father helplessly. "Where's Helen?"

"She won't see him. Anyway, she's in the garden with Henry Yates. I'll bet Henry would punch him in the nose!"

"I'm entirely capable of handling my children's affairs," said Mr. Troy, sounding the reverse; and he went to the library unhappily.

Victor Luz was seated on the edge of a chair, knees spread slightly, big hands grasping suede gloves and a Homburg over the head of a furled umbrella. His dark skin was quite yellow. He rose immediately.

"See here, Luz—" began Mr. Troy with a scowl.

"Excuse me, Mr. Troy," said Luz, "but I call this morning for two purposes. I wish to abase myself before your daughter for having made a public scene last night. But she will not see me. Therefore, sir, I address my apologies to you."

"Well, ah, yes. Yes, I see," said Mr Troy.

"The second purpose of my visit is to seek your permission to ask your daughter's hand in marriage," said Victor Luz. "I am madly in love with Helen, Mr. Troy. I cannot —"

"—live without her. Yes, yes," sighed Mr. Troy. "It's surprising, though, how many of you fellows manage to survive. Mr. Luz, my only mission in life is to see my daughters happy. If Helen thinks you'd do it, it doesn't matter what I think. Go ahead and ask her."

"Ah, you are a great man!" cried Luz joyfully.

"Not at all," said Mr. Troy with a grin. "I'm just passing the buck to more capable hands."

But Luz was raptly soliloquizing, "I have spoken to her of my love, of her beauty, and so on, but the word 'marriage' . . . How could she have failed to misunderstand? I'll ask her now!"

At this moment the library door opened and the fair Helen appeared, followed by Henry Middleton Yates. Behind Henry hovered Effie, trembling.

Luz blinked as if at an unbearable radiance. He went to her swiftly, engulfing her hand. "Helen. I must speak to you!"

Helen laughed, withdrawing her hand and wiping it carefully with her handkerchief. Then she went up to her father and she said, "Dad, Henry has something to say to you."

"Henry," said Mr. Troy. "Oh! Oh, yes, yes."

"I've asked Helen to marry me, Mr. Troy," said Henry Middleton Yates, "and she's said yes. Do I have your approval, sir?"

Mr. Troy looked bewildered. For a cry came from an unexpected quarter, the throat of his daughter Effie. After that single noise Effie became silent and mousier than ever—she scurried down the hall as if cats were after her. Helen looked thoughtful and Henry Yates blank.

It was all too much for Mr. Troy, especially since in the very next instant Henry Yates was on his back on the library floor, giving an incredible imitation of a man fighting for his life. He had been bowled over by the head of Victor Luz, and Luz now had his great hands around Henry's throat and was banging Henry's head against the floor. Mr. Troy was conscious of his daughter Helen making some unpleasantly shrill sounds.

"Descendant of body lice!" shouted Luz, his dark skin now magenta. "You will never have her! I will kill her first!"

Henry gurgled something indignant, and Helen whacked Luz's head with the handle of his umbrella. Mr. Troy found himself growing strong with anger. He had always believed in the brotherhood of man, and he had supported the United Nations wholeheartedly, but this episode. . . !

And Mr. Troy throttled Victor Luz so vigorously that, between the grip on his throat and the blows on his head, Luz released his hold on poor Henry Yates and fell back blanched and powerless.

Helen was on her knees beside her gasping cavalier, crooning solace. Luz got to his feet, fumbling for his umbrella. He did not look at either of them.

"I said I would kill her," he said in a bubbly voice to no one in particular, "and if she marries Yates I will."

"But that isn't all of it, Mr. Queen," Mr. Troy said a month later. "When my prospective son-in-law got to his feet, he knocked the fellow kicking, and you'd have thought that would be the end of it. But it was only the beginning."

"More threats?" said Ellery. "Or actual attempts on your daughter's life?"

"No, no, it was the beginning of an entirely new relationship. I don't pretend to understand young people nowadays," said Mr. Troy, using his handkerchief. "In my day he'd have been horsewhipped or put in jail, and no amount of crawling on his—I beg your pardon, Miss Porter, is it?—but this has really got me down."

"I don't think we follow, Mr. Troy," said Nikki.

"Why, he no sooner recovered from Henry's knockout than Luz was a changed man. Butter wouldn't melt in his mouth. Sucking dove—ate humble pie as if he enjoyed it. Apologized practically on his knees. Positively embarrassed me. The next day he sent Helen a bushel of orchids with the inscription, *With Best Wishes for the Coming Event, Your Friend, Victor Luz*—he wouldn't go very far in the greeting card business, I'm afraid, haha!—and he sent Henry Yates a case of sixty-five-year-old cognac, and the result of all this was that within a week Helen had forgiven him and Henry was saying he wasn't such a bad scout after all."

"And within two weeks?" asked Ellery. "Because it's evident it didn't stop there."

"You're darned right it didn't," said Mr. Troy, indignantly. "Within two weeks Helen had invited him to the wedding, because Luz threw a big party at the Versailles at which Helen and Henry were guests of honor and, as I understand it, the fellow spent most of the evening proposing champagne toasts to their happiness."

"How very sweet," said Nikki.

"Mr. Troy, I think, Nikki," said Ellery, "detects a dry bouquet."

"Mr. Queen, I yield to no man in lovingkindness," said Mr. Troy earnestly, "and I'm not saying this because the fellow comes from Europe—some of my best friends are Europeans—but I tell you this particular individual isn't to be trusted. He'd be dangerous if he were a one hundred per cent American. I consider myself a judge of character, and I saw his face when he heard that

Helen was going to marry Henry Yates. There was murder there!"

"Clarence Darrow once remarked that he'd never killed anyone, but he frequently got satisfaction reading the obituary notices," murmured Ellery. "However. You distrust this man—"

"I know his kind!"

"—and he's to be at your daughter's wedding—"

"He's not only going to be at it," howled Mr. Troy, "he's going to be the best man!"

There was a silence.

"Oh, dear," said Nikki. "How did he get to be that?"

"He's stuck close to Henry ever since the fight in my library," said Mr. Troy, "and apparently he's made Henry feel that the only way Henry can show there are no hard feelings is to let him be best man at the wedding. I've appealed to Helen, but she's walking on clouds these days and she thinks it's simply too romantic! I tell you, it's enough to—"

"When and where is the wedding, Mr. Troy?" asked Ellery thoughtfully. "And what kind of wedding will it be?"

"Quiet, Mr. Queen, very quiet. My wife died not long ago and of course a big church wedding is out of the question. I wanted Helen to wait a few months, but June starts on Friday, and she insists on a June wedding—June weddings *are* lucky, of course—and she won't wait another year till next June. So it's to be at home, with a small select guest list—immediate family and a few friends—this coming Saturday . . . I'd have gone to the police, Mr. Queen," said Mr. Troy glumly, "except that . . . Would you consider coming to the wedding to sort of keep an eye on things?"

"I really don't think you have much to worry about, Mr. Troy," said Ellery with a smile, "but if it will ease your mind—"

"Thank you!"

"But wouldn't this man Luz," asked Nikki, "be suspicious of the presence of a complete stranger?"

"Let him!" said Mr. Troy.

"Mr. Troy's right, Nikki. If Luz knows he's being watched, he's much less likely to try anything. If, of course," added Ellery indulgently, "he has any such intention."

Indulgent or not, Ellery did not wait for Saturday to make the acquaintance of Victor Luz. He set about getting to know him immediately, by remote control. In addition, Ellery confided in Inspector Queen, and the Inspector assigned Sergeant Thomas Velie of his staff to special duty, which consisted in following Mr. Luz conspicuously wherever he went.

The Sergeant executed his assignment as ordered, grumbling at the affront to his professional pride. As a result, by the day of the Troy-Yates nuptials, Ellery had an approximate knowledge of Mr. Luz's life and habits. And Mr. Luz had the certain knowledge that he was being shadowed.

As for the dossier on Luz, Ellery found nothing in it of interest beyond repeated evidence that Luz had a beastly temper and went berserk occasionally, and that he came from a long line of European noblemen with a history of elegant sadism and, in the older days, refined savagery toward peasants, *pour le sport.* For the rest, Luz lived well and honorably on his father's money, and his personal life was neither more nor less questionable than that of any other young Park Avenue bachelor.

Nevertheless, because he was thorough, Ellery arranged with Richard K. Troy for Sergeant Velie to attend the wedding, too.

"Acting the part of a detective," Ellery explained.

"What d'ye mean, acting?" growled the Sergeant.

"Private detective, Sergeant, ostensibly watching the wedding presents."

"Oh," said Sergeant Velie; but he went to the wedding unmollified.

The June day was as rare as any bride could have yearned for. It was a garden wedding, with the high Troy walls invisible under thousands of roses and the river invisible beyond the walls. The bride's gown was by Mainbocher, the floral decorations and bouquets were by Max Schling, the catering was by the Ritz, the presiding clergyman was a bishop, and there were no more than five dozen wedding guests. And Juno Regina smiled down from the battlements of heaven.

As far as Ellery could see, he was merely wasting an afternoon healthily. He and Velie, in striped trousers, had arrived early and they had elaborately searched the house and grounds, making sure that Mr. Luz saw them at their labors. Mr. Luz had paled slightly on seeing the heroic figure of Sergeant Velie, and he had made some remark to the bride's father.

"Oh, detectives," growled Mr. Troy, trying to sound careless.

Luz had bitten his lip and then, impeccable in his cutaway, he had gone upstairs to the rooms set aside for the groom. When he found Ellery at his heels, he ground his teeth. Ellery waited patiently outside the door. When Luz, after a long time, emerged with Henry Yates, Ellery followed them downstairs.

"Who the devil is that?" he heard Yates ask Luz.

"A detective, Mr. Troy said."

"What on earth for?"

In the crowded room downstairs Ellery nodded to Sergeant Velie, and Velie collided with Luz.

"Here, fellow! What are you doing?" cried Luz angrily.

"Pardon," said the Sergeant; and he reported to Ellery that their man was not heeled.

Neither man took his eyes off Luz for an instant.

When the ceremony began, Ellery was in the front row of chairs, directly behind Luz. Sergeant Velie was in the doorway of the reception room off the terrace, one hand tucked under his coat in Napoleon's classic pose.

Ellery concentrated on the best man, letting the bishop's murmur trickle over him. It had all long since begun to seem unreal and silly. Luz stood a little behind and to the side of the groom, looking properly solemn, and quite conscious of the watchful stranger behind him.

Yates's big body was between him and Helen Troy; he could not possibly have reached her without interception. And the bride was too beautiful in her wedding gown to give credence to thoughts of death—far more beautiful than any woman there, in particular her maid of honor, who was her sister Euphemia and seemed precariously on the verge of tears.

And Mr. Troy, to the side of the bride, kept his beetled glance directly on the best man, as if challenging him to violate the loveliness of the moment by so much as a thought.

Too silly for words . . .

"And now the ring, if you please," the bishop was saying.

The groom turned to the best man, and the best man's fingers automatically went to the left-hand lower pocket of his vest. They probed deeper. They stopped probing, paralyzed. A horrified titter ran through the garden. Victor Luz began to search frantically through all his pockets. The bishop glanced heavenward.

"For—for God's sake, Victor," whispered Henry Yates. "This is no time for a gag!"

"Gag!" choked Luz. "I assure you . . . I could have sworn . . ."

"Maybe you left it in your topcoat!"

"Yes. Yes! But where. . . ?"

Effie Troy stretched her skinny neck their way and whispered, "Your topcoat's in the clothes closet in the upstairs hall, Victor. I put it there myself when you got here."

"Hurry up," groaned the groom. "Of all the idiot . . . Darling, I'm so sorry . . . Bishop, please forgive . . ."

"It's quite all right, young man," sighed the bishop.

"Won't be a minute," stammered Luz. "So terribly sorry . . ."

Ellery pinched his nose, so when Victor Luz disappeared in the reception room Sergeant Velie clumped after him.

When Luz emerged from the house Ellery quietly rose and made his way to the terrace, where the Sergeant stood waiting. Luz was advancing across the lawn holding a ring aloft shamefacedly, and everyone was smiling. He handed it to Henry Yates with careful ceremony, looking relieved. The bishop, looking martyred, resumed.

"Now if you will repeat after me . . ."

"What did Luz do, Sergeant?" whispered Ellery.

"Went upstairs to a hall closet, fished around in a man's topcoat, came up with the ring—"

"That's all he did?"

"That's all. Just beat it back downstairs with it."

They watched.

"It's all over!"

"And I had to miss my Turkish bath for this." Sergeant Velie sounded disgusted.

Ellery hurried out onto the lawn. The bride and groom were surrounded by laughing people, kissing and being kissed, shaking hands, everyone talking at once. The newly minted Mrs. Henry Middleton Yates had never looked more mythically happy, her sister Effie more realistically plain, the groom more dazedly successful, the bride's father more puzzled and relieved.

As for Luz, he had quietly congratulated the bride and groom and he was now on the edge of the crowd, smiling and saying something to the white-cheeked Effie, whose eyes were tragically on her sister's husband. Mr. Troy was conversing animatedly with the bishop. Waiters were beginning to wheel out veritable floats of tables, others were beginning to circulate with portable bars. Two photographers were busy setting up. The sun was mild, the roses sugared the air, and a barge beyond the river wall hooted its good wishes.

Ellery shrugged. Now that Helen Troy was safely Mrs. Yates, the gyrations of the past two hours seemed infantile. He would have to see Mr. Troy . . .

"Darling! What's the matter?"

The voice was the groom's. Ellery craned. The mob around the couple had stopped milling with a curious suddenness. Mr. Troy and the bishop had turned inquiringly.

With violence, Ellery shoved through the crowd.

"Henry . . ." The bride was leaning against her husband. Her cheeks were chalky under the makeup. She had a hand to her eyes, as if shading them from an intolerable sun.

"What is it, dearest? . . . *Helen!*"

"Catch her!" Ellery shouted.

But the bride was already on the grass in a broken white pile, staring into the sun.

Inspector Queen was definitely a menace that day. He had an unusually bitter altercation with Dr. Prouty of the Medical Examiner's office, a few searing words for the bewildered Sergeant Velie, and deathly subtemperatures for his son. Having already been exposed to absolute zero in the person of Richard K. Troy before the poor man was put to bed by his physician, Ellery was thoroughly refrigerated. He hung about the proceedings like a fugitive drip of stalactite. Effie Troy was in her room in hysterics, in care of a nurse; Henry Yates sat on a chair in the reception room vacantly, drinking brandy by the water glass and not even looking up when addressed; Victor Luz was in Troy's library chain-smoking under the murderous eye of Sergeant Velie; there was no one to talk to, no one at all. Ellery wandered miserably about, yearning for Nikki Porter.

About the only thing everyone agreed on without argument that abrasive afternoon was that it had been the quickest June marriage in society history.

Finally, after a century, the Inspector beckoned.

"Yes, Dad!" Ellery was at his father's side like an arrow. "Why the freezout?"

Inspector Queen looked positively hostile.

"I still don't know how it happened." Ellery sounded as if he were about to cry. "She just dropped, Dad. She was dead in a few minutes."

"Seven minutes from the time the poison was administered," the Inspector said frigidly.

"How? She hadn't had time to eat or drink anything!"

"Directly into the bloodstream. With this." And the Inspector opened his fist. "And you let him!"

"Her wedding ring?"

The ring gleamed on his father's palm. It was a plain gold band.

"You can handle it. The sting's removed."

Ellery shook his head, then seized the ring and scrutinized it fiercely. He looked up, incredulous.

"That's right," nodded the Inspector. "A poison ring. Hidden automatic spring on the inner surface of the band that ejects a hollow needle point under pressure. Like the fang of a snake. And this was loaded, brother. Right after the ceremony everybody was congratulating her, kissing her, shaking her hand . . . Quite a gimmick. The handshaker exerts just the right amount of pressure on the hand wearing the ring, and whammo—a dead bride in seven minutes. If she felt the sting, she was too excited to call attention to it. I've heard of the kiss of death, but the handshake of death—that's a new one!"

"Not so new," muttered Ellery. "Poison rings go back at least to the time of Demosthenes. And Hannibal, who killed himself with one. But those weren't like this. This is the *anello della morte* with reverse Venetian. In the medieval model the hollow point was in the bezel and scratched the person with whom the wearer of the ring was shaking hands. This one pricks the wearer."

"Medieval. Europe." The Inspector sounded very grim; he was an incurable softie, and the sight of the beautiful young corpse in her wedding gown under the June sun had infuriated him. "It's an antique—I've had it expertized. This is the kind of cute gadget an Old World blueblood like Luz might have had in his family locker for centuries."

"It's also the kind of thing you might pick up in a New World Third Avenue pawnshop," said Ellery. "Is it an exact duplicate—except for the mechanism—of the ring Yates had bought?"

"I haven't been able to get much out of Yates, but I gather it's not quite the same. It wouldn't be. Yates's ring, of course, is gone. The killer counted on the excitement and tension of the ceremony preventing Yates from noticing that the poison ring was a bit different when Luz handed it to him. Yates bought his ring two weeks ago and showed it to all of them except Helen, so the killer had plenty of time to dig up a poison ring resembling it—if he didn't have one handy all the time."

"When did Yates turn the regular ring over to Luz?"

"Last night. Luz claims, of course, that he knows nothing about this poison ring. He says—he *says*—when he went upstairs to the hall closet during the ceremony and fished around in his topcoat and felt the ring, he just took it out and hurried downstairs with it without taking a good look at it, and Velie confirms that."

"And then he handed it to Yates, who may have palmed it," said Ellery.

"Yates? The *groom?* Palmed it? I don't—"

"Suppose Henry Yates had the poison ring concealed in his hand. Luz hands him the innocent ring, Yates palms it and puts the poison ring on Helen's finger."

The Inspector seemed to pop from all directions. "Are you out of your mind? That boy want to kill the girl he was marrying? And what a girl! And in such a way!"

"I don't say he did, but you'll find," said Ellery, "that Helen Troy came into a wad of money the instant she got married. By the will of her mother, who had an independent fortune. And Henry Yates is, after all, merely a bond salesman—a very smart bond salesman, incidentally, or he'd never have snagged the Troy girl. And you can't ignore the corollary fact that such a time and method of murdering his bride would give Yates the perfect fall guy—the man who handed him the ring, the man who had been rejected by the bride, the man who had actually threatened to kill her if she married Yates."

Inspector Queen said through his dentures, "You know what your trouble is, son? A degenerate imagination."

"It's not imagination at all. It's logic."

"It's—it's corruption!"

"And then there's Effie Troy," Ellery continued surgically. "Effie is hopelessly in love with Yates—a strabismic jackass could see that. And it was Effie, by her own admission, who hung Luz's topcoat in the upper hall closet. Velie says none of the wedding guests or hired help had access to that closet, Dad. He had the staircase in view the whole time and he says only Luz and the immediate family used those stairs from the time Luz arrived at the house."

The Inspector fixed his son with a skewering eye. "Then you don't believe Luz did this?"

"I don't see anything that pins it on him. There are at least two other possible theories, either of which makes more sense."

"To you on cloud eighty-eight," rasped his father. "To my simple brain it's simple. Luz threatened to kill Helen Troy if she married Yates. That's motive—"

"One motive," said Ellery patiently.

"As best man Luz had charge of the wedding ring and had the best chance to substitute the poison ring for the real one. That's opportunity."

"One opportunity, and only equally as good as Effie Troy's and Henry Yates's," mumbled Ellery.

"Luz shook hands with the bride right after the ceremony—"

"So did dozens of other people."

The Inspector glared, turning an eggplant color. "If no evidence to the contrary turns up in the next twenty-four hours," he snarled, "father of a genius or no father of a genius, I'm arresting Luz for the murder of that girl!"

It must be faced: Ellery did not shine in the Troy-Yates-Luz case. In a lesser way, that June wedding was as unlucky for him as for the bride. Not only had he failed to prevent the tragedy he had been commissioned to prevent, not only was he an honorless prophet in his own house, but he found that he had suddenly lost caste in the eyes of his secretary.

Nikki was Juno's messenger to her mortal sex; licit love and blessed betrothal had no more fanatical advocate on earth. The murder of a beautiful bride on her wedding day—more, with the first holy kiss of her husband still warm on her lips—struck Miss Porter as a more inhuman crime than the drawing and quartering of newborn babes. She was all for applying vigilante law to the monster Luz—she was positive he was a monster—and after reading the details in the Sunday paper she came to the Queen apartment, notwithstanding it was her day off, expressly to whip Mr. Queen into the proper bloodthirsty frame of mind —after telling him, of course, what she thought of his bungling.

"How could you have let it happen, Ellery?" cried Miss Porter scathingly. "Right under your nose! When you were supposed to be *watching!*"

"Surely," said Mr. Queen wearily, "I can be forgiven for not anticipating that somebody was going to bump her off with a wedding ring? Even geniuses—to quote a certain relative of mine—can't be expected to think of wedding rings as dangerous weapons. We're not living in the days of the Borgias, Nikki."

Ellery jumped up and began to walk violently. "It was diabolical. The whole body of myth and folk belief that surrounds the institution of marriage got in the way. Did you ever hear of the medical finger?"

"What an odd way to change the subject," said Miss Porter coldly.

"It is the subject. The medical finger was what the English centuries ago called the third finger—not counting the thumb. Their leeches used that finger in stirring drugs and potions—"

"Educational," began Nikki.

"—and it was believed that that finger was connected with the heart directly by a special nerve and that no poisonous substance could come in contact with it without giving a warning. And that's the finger, Nikki, wedding rings are worn on."

"And poetic," finished Nikki, "but, considering what happened, a lot of malarkey, don't you agree? And it hardly puts Victor Lüz where he belongs, does it? Why isn't he in the clink? Why did the Inspector grill poor Effie Troy and that poor, poor Henry Yates last night till all hours? What is everybody waiting for?—What's the matter?"

For Ellery had stopped in the middle of the room, staring as if he were peering into the fourth dimension and being revolted by what he saw there.

"Ellery, what's wrong?"

Ellery came back to the solar system with an unmistakable shudder. "Wrong?" he said feebly. "Did I say anything is wrong?"

"No, but you looked—"

"Electrified, Nikki. I'm always electrified by my own stupidity. Get Dad on the phone," he muttered. "Try headquarters. I've got to talk to him . . . God help me."

"He's tied up," Nikki said when she had put the phone down. "He'll call you back. You're acting awfully strange, Ellery."

Ellery backed into a chair and fumbled unseeingly for his cigarettes. "Nikki, a premise of this case has been that the pressure of a handshake, exerted a certain way, was required to release the spring in the poison ring. When you shake hands with somebody, which hand do you offer?"

"Which hand do I offer?" said Nikki. "My right, of course."

"And which hand does the other person offer?"

"His right. He has to."

"But on which hand does a woman wear her wedding ring?"

"Her . . . left."

"Merest detail, you see. Trivial. The only thing is, it solves the case and, of course, I forgot it until just now." From his tone Nikki expected him to produce scorpions and iron-tipped whips. "How could a normal right-handed handshake have released that poisoned needle, when the ring was on Helen's left hand?"

"Impossible," said Nikki excitedly. "So it wasn't done by a handshake at all!"

"That's not the alternative, Nikki—it had to be done by a handshake. The alternative is that, since the poisoned ring was on Helen's left hand, *it was her left hand which was shaken.*"

Nikki looked blank.

"Don't you see? In the press of people around her just after the ceremony, the murderer came up and extended his left hand, forcing Helen to extend hers. So the murderer was left-handed."

Miss Porter considered this. "Come, come," she said at last, with no respect at all. "Being a wedding ring, it *had* to be on her left hand, therefore the killer *had* to give her a left-handed handshake, so he isn't necessarily left-handed at all."

The master, sorely tried as he was, managed a smile. "His crime, Nikki, necessitated a left-handed handshake. The brain is modified and restrained by the nature of the machine it runs. If a right-handed man were planning a crime that depended on the use of a hand, he'd plan one that depended on the use of his right hand. The very conception of a left-handed crime indicates a left-handed criminal.

Ellery shrugged. "When the bishop asked for the ring during the ceremony and the groom turned to his best man, *his best man's hand automatically went to the lower* left-hand *pocket of his vest.* Had he been right-handed, he would have searched, or pretended to search, his right-hand pocket, because a right-handed man—when he has a free choice of sides and there are no conditioning factors present—will automatically reach for a right-side pocket. Victor Luz automatically reached for a left-side pocket, so he's left-handed.

"So for once," Ellery sighed, "logic comes to the support of a circumstantial case. Luz meant his threat, and left the ring in his topcoat deliberately to make it look later as if anyone could have switched rings, not merely himself. Dad was ri—"

The telephone rang.

"Ellery?" It was Inspector Queen's sharp voice.

"Dad—" began Ellery.

But the Inspector said, "I told you Luz was our man. Dumb as hell, besides. We traced that poison ring to an antique shop on Madison Avenue, and when Luz was faced with the evidence he broke. I've just got through blotting the ink on his signed confession. All that fancy big-brain stuff about Henry Yates and Effie Troy! What did you want, Ellery?"

Ellery swallowed. Then he said, "Nothing, Dad," humbly, and hung up.

the Russian detective story

—old style and new style

In this issue we bring you a double novelty: first, an old-style Russian detective story—Anton Chekhov's "The Safety Match"; and, second, a new-style Russian detective story—the only contemporary Russian detective story we have ever read, or even heard of.

The Chekhov story is "straightforward" detection, complete with physical clues, astonishing deductions, and in its own way, a "surprise solution." But this is not the work of the tender, tragic Chekhov who is regarded by many critics as the greatest of all Russian writers (a judgment open to serious debate) and by other critics as the greatest of short-story writers (a judgment, paradoxically, less open to serious debate). Rather, it is a perceptive burlesque-satire (remember, it was written two generations ago!) that illustrates why Chekhov was one of Russia's most popular humorists; yet it reveals Chekhov's penetrating and sympathetic observation of human nature. As Albert Thibaudet once said, a Russian story is always the story of the undoing of a life; the application in this instance is ironic, to say the least. . . .

We do not know exactly when Anton Chekhov wrote "The Safety Match"—but surely it was before the turn of the 20th Century. The contemporary Russian detective story which follows the Chekhov tale of detection was written nearly a half century later. But first read Russian ratiocination—old style . . .

THE SAFETY MATCH

by ANTON CHEKHOV

On the morning of October 6, 1885, in the office of the Inspector of Police of the second division of S— District, there appeared a respectably dressed young man, who announced that his master, Marcus Ivanovitch Klausoff, a retired officer of the Horse Guards, separated from his wife, had been murdered. While making this announcement the young man was white and terribly agitated. His hands trembled and his eyes were full of terror.

"Whom have I the honor of addressing?" asked the Inspector.

"Psyekoff, Lieutenant Klausoff's agent and director; agriculturist and mechanician."

The Inspector and his deputy, on visiting the scene of the occurrence in company with Psyekoff, found the following: near the wing in which Klausoff had lived was gathered a dense crowd—the news of the murder had sped swift as lightning through the neighborhood, and the peasantry, thanks to the fact that the day was a holiday, had hurried together from all the neighboring villages. There was much commotion and talk. Here and there, pale, tear-stained faces were seen. The door of Klausoff's bedroom was found locked. The key was inside.

"It is quite clear that the scoundrels got in by the window!" said Psyekoff as they examined the door.

They went to the garden, into which the bedroom window opened. The window looked dark and ominous. It was covered by a faded green curtain. One corner of the curtain was slightly turned up, which made it possible to look into the bedroom.

"Did any of you look into the window?" asked the Inspector.

"Certainly not, your worship!" answered Ephraim, the gardener, a little gray-haired old man, who looked like a retired sergeant. "Who's going to look in, if all their bones are shaking?"

"Ah, Marcus Ivanovitch!" sighed the Inspector, looking at the window, "I told you you would come to a bad end. I told the dear man, but he wouldn't listen. Dissipation doesn't bring any good."

"Thanks to Ephraim," said Psyekoff; "but for him, we would never have guessed. He was the first to guess that something was wrong. He comes to me this morning, and says, 'Why is the master so long getting up? He hasn't left his bedroom for a whole week!' The moment he said that, it was just as if someone had hit me with an ax. The thought flashed through my mind, 'We haven't had a sight of him since last Saturday, and today is Sunday.'

Seven whole days—not a doubt of it!"

"Ay, poor fellow!" again sighed the Inspector. "He was a clever fellow, finely educated, and kindhearted at that. And in society, nobody could touch him. But he was a waster, God rest his soul! I was prepared for anything since he refused to live with Olga Petrovna. Poor thing, a good wife, but a sharp tongue. Stephen!" the Inspector called to one of his deputies, "go over to my house this minute, and send Andrew to the Captain of Police with this information. Tell him that Marcus Ivanovitch has been murdered. And run over to the orderly—why should he sit there kicking his heels? Let him come here! And go as fast as you can to the Examining Magistrate, Nicholas Yermolaiyevitch. Tell him to come over—wait, I'll write him a note."

The Inspector posted sentinels around the wing of the house, wrote a letter to the Examining Magistrate, and then went over to the director's for a glass of tea. Ten minutes later he was sitting on a stool, carefully nibbling a lump of sugar, and swallowing the scalding tea.

"There you are," he was saying to Psyekoff; "there you are! A noble by birth, a rich man—a favorite of the gods, you may say, as Pushkin has it, and what did he come to? He drank and dissipated and—there you are—he's murdered."

After a couple of hours the Examining Magistrate drove up. Nicholas Yermolaiyevitch Chubikoff—for that was the Magistrate's name—was a tall fleshy old man of sixty, who had been wrestling with the duties of his office for a quarter of a century. Everybody in the district knew him as an honest man, wise, energetic, and in love with his work. He was accompanied to the scene of the murder by his inveterate companion, fellow worker, and secretary, Dukovski, a tall enterprising young fellow of about twenty-six.

"It is possible, gentlemen?" cried Chubikoff, entering Psyekoff's room, and quickly shaking hands with everyone. "Is it possible? Marcus Ivanovitch? Murdered? No, it is impossible! Im-poss-i-ble!"

"Go in there," sighed the Inspector.

"Lord, have mercy on us! Only last Friday I saw him at the fair in Farabankoff. I had a drink of vodka with him, save the mark!"

"Go in there," again sighed the Inspector.

They sighed, uttered exclamations of horror, drank a glass of tea each, and went to the wing.

"Get back!" the orderly cried to the peasants.

In the wing, the Examining Magistrate began his work by examining the bedroom door. The door proved to be of pine, painted yellow, and was uninjured. Nothing was found which could serve as a clue. They had to break in the door.

"Everyone not here on business is requested to keep away," said the Magistrate, when, after much hammering and shaking, the door yielded to ax and chisel. "I request this, in the interest of the investigation. Orderly, don't let anyone in!"

Chubikoff and his assistant and the Inspector opened the door, and hesitatingly, one after the other, entered the room. Their eyes met the following sight: beside the single window stood the big wooden bed with a huge feather mattress. On the crumpled feather bed lay a tumbled, crumpled quilt. The pillow, in a cotton pillow case, also much crumpled, was dragging on the floor.

On the table beside the bed lay a silver watch and a silver twenty-kopeck piece. Beside them lay some sulphur matches. Beside the bed, the little table, and the single chair, there was no furniture in the room.

Looking under the bed, the Inspector saw a couple of dozen empty bottles, an old straw hat, and a quart of vodka. Under the table lay one top boot, covered with dust.

Casting a glance around the room, the Magistrate frowned and grew red in the face.

"Scoundrels!" he muttered, clenching his fists.

"And where is Marcus Ivanovitch?" asked Dukovski in a low voice.

"Mind your own business," Chubikoff answered roughly. "Be good enough to examine the floor. This is not the first case of the kind I have had to deal with. Eugraph Kuzmitch," he said, turning to the Inspector and lowering his voice, "in 1870 I had another case like this. But you must remember it—the murder of the merchant Portraitoff. It was just the same there. The scoundrels murdered him and dragged the corpse out through the window—"

Chubikoff went up to the window, pulled the curtain to one side, and carefully pushed the window. The window opened.

"It opens, you see! It wasn't fastened. Hm. There are tracks under the window. Look, there is the track of a knee! Somebody got in there. We must examine the window thoroughly."

"There is nothing special to be found on the floor," said Dukovski. "No stains or scratches. The only thing I found was a struck safety match. Here it is. So far as I remember, Marcus Ivanovitch did not smoke. And he always used sulphur matches, never safety matches. Perhaps this safety match may serve as a clue."

"Oh, do shut up," cried the Magistrate deprecatingly. "You go on about your match! I can't abide these dreamers! Instead of chasing matches, you had better examine the bed."

After a thorough examination of the bed, Dukovski reported: "There are no spots, either of blood or of anything else. There are like-wise no new torn places. On the pillow there are signs of teeth. The quilt is stained with something which looks like beer and smells like beer. The general aspect of the bed gives grounds for thinking that a struggle took place on it."

"I know there was a struggle, without your telling me! You are not being asked about a struggle. Instead of looking for struggles, you had better—"

"Here is one top boot, but there is no sign of the other."

"Well, and what of that?"

"It proves that they strangled him while he was taking his boots off. He hadn't time to take the second boot off when—"

"There you go!—and how do you know they strangled him?"

"There are marks of teeth on the pillow. The pillow itself is badly crumpled and thrown a couple of yards from the bed."

"Listen to his foolishness! Better come into the garden. You would be better employed examining the garden than digging around here. I can do that without you."

When they reached the garden they began by examining the grass. The grass under the window was crushed and trampled. A bushy burdock growing under the window close to the wall was also trampled. Dukovski succeeded in finding on it some broken twigs and a piece of cotton wool. On the upper branches were found some fine hairs of dark-blue wool.

"What color was his last suit?" Dukovski asked Psyekoff.

"Yellow crash."

"Excellent! You see they wore blue!"

A few twigs of the burdock were cut off and carefully wrapped in paper by the investigators. At this point Police Captain Artsuybasheff Svistakovski and Dr. Tyutyeff arrived. The Captain bade them "Good day," and immediately began to satisfy his curiosity.

The doctor, a tall, very lean man with dull eyes, a long nose, and a pointed chin, without greeting anyone or asking about anything, sat down on a log, sighed, and began: "The Serbians are at war again. What in heaven's name can they want now? Austria, it's all your doing!"

The examination of the window from the outside did not supply any conclusive data. The examination of the grass and the bushes nearest to the window yielded a series of useful clues. For example, Dukovski succeeded in discovering a long dark streak, made up of spots, on the grass, which led some distance into the center of the garden. The streak ended under one of the lilac bushes in a dark brown stain. Under this same lilac bush was found a top boot, which turned out to be the fellow of the boot already found in the bedroom.

"That is a bloodstain made some time ago," said Dukovski.

At the word "blood" the doctor

rose, and going over lazily, looked at the stain.

"Yes, it is blood," he muttered.

"That shows he wasn't strangled," said Chubikoff, looking sarcastically at Dukovski.

"They strangled him in the bedroom; and here, fearing he might come round again, they struck him a blow with some sharp-pointed instrument. The stain under the bush proves that he lay there a considerable time, while they were looking about for some way of carrying him out of the garden."

"Well, and how about the boot?"

"The boot confirms completely my idea that they murdered him while he was taking his boots off before going to bed. He had already taken off one boot, and the other, this one here, he had only had time to take half off. The half-off boot came off of itself, while the body was dragged over, and fell—"

"There's a lively imagination for you!" laughed Chubikoff. "He goes on and on like that! When will you learn enough to stop making deductions? Instead of arguing and deducing, it would be much better if you took some of the blood-stained grass for analysis!"

When they had finished their examination and drawn a plan of the locality, the investigators went to the director's office to write their report and have breakfast. While they were breakfasting they went on talking.

"The watch, the money, and so on—all untouched—" Chubikoff began, "show as clearly as two and two are four that the murder was not committed for the purpose of robbery."

"The murder was committed by an educated man," insisted Dukovski.

"What evidence have you of that?"

"The safety match proves that to me, for the peasants hereabouts are not yet acquainted with safety matches. Only the landowners use them, and by no means all of them. And it is evident that there was not one murderer but at least three. Two held him, while one killed him. Klausoff was strong, and the murderers must have known it."

"What would his strength be if asleep?"

"The murderers came on him while he was taking off his boots. That proves that he wasn't asleep."

"Stop inventing deductions! Better eat!"

"In my opinion, your worship," said the gardener Ephraim, setting the samovar on the table, "it was nobody but Nicholas who did this dirty trick."

"Quite possible," said Psyekoff. "Who is Nicholas?"

"The master's valet, your worship," answered Ephraim. "Who else could it be? He's a rascal, your worship. He's a drunkard and a blackguard, the like of which Heaven should not permit. He always took the master his vodka and put the master to bed. Who else could it be? And I also venture to point out to your worship, he once boasted at the inn that he would kill the master! It happened on account of Aquilina, the woman, you know. He was making up to a soldier's widow. She pleased the master; the master made friends with her himself, and Nicholas—naturally, he was mad! He is rolling about drunk in the kitchen now. He is crying, and telling lies, saying he is sorry for the master—"

The Examining Magistrate ordered Nicholas to be brought. Nicholas, a lanky young fellow, with a long freckled nose, narrow-chested, and wearing an old jacket of his master's, entered Psyekoff's room and bowed low before the Magistrate. His face was sleepy and tear-stained. He was tipsy and could hardly keep his feet.

"Where is your master?" Chubikoff asked him.

"Murdered, your worship."

As he said this, Nicholas blinked and began to weep.

"We know he was murdered. But where is his body?"

"They say he was dragged out of the window and buried in the garden, your worship."

"Hm! The results of the investigation are known in the kitchen already—that's bad! Where were you, my good fellow, the night the master was murdered? Saturday night, that is."

Nicholas raised his head, and began to think.

"I don't know, your worship," he said. "I was drunk and don't remember."

"An alibi," whispered Dukovski, smiling and rubbing his hands.

"So-o! And why is there blood under the window?"

Nicholas jerked his head up and considered.

"Hurry up!" said the Captain of Police.

"Right away. That blood doesn't amount to anything, your worship. I was cutting a chicken's throat. I was doing it quite simply, in the usual way, when all of a sudden it broke away and started to run. That is where the blood came from."

Ephraim declared that Nicholas did kill a chicken every evening, and always in some new place, but that nobody ever heard of a half-killed chicken running about the garden, though of course it wasn't impossible.

"An alibi," sneered Dukovski, "and what an asinine alibi!"

"Did you know Aquilina?"

"Yes, your worship, I know her."

"And the master cut you out with her?"

"Not at all. *He* cut me out—Mr. Psyekoff there, Ivan Mikhailovitch; and the master cut Ivan Mikhailovitch out. That is how it was."

Psyekoff grew confused and began to scratch his left eye. Dukovski looked at him attentively, noted his confusion, and started. He noticed that the director had dark-blue trousers, which he had not observed before. The trousers reminded him of the dark-blue threads found on the burdock. Chubikoff in his turn glanced suspiciously at Psyekoff.

"Go," he said to Nicholas. "And now permit me to put a question to you, Mr. Psyekoff. Of course you were here last Saturday evening?"

"Yes, I had supper with Marcus Ivanovitch about ten o'clock."

"And afterward?"

"Afterward—afterward— Really, I do not remember," stammered Psyekoff. "I had a good deal to drink at supper. I don't remember when or where I went to sleep. Why are you all looking at me like that, as if I was the murderer?"

"Where were you when you woke up?"

"I was in the servants' kitchen, lying behind the stove. They can all confirm it. How I got behind the stove I don't know—"

"Do not get agitated. Did you know Aquilina?"

"There's nothing extraordinary about that—"

"She first liked you and then preferred Klausoff?"

"Yes. Ephraim, give us some more mushrooms. Do you want some more tea, Eugraph Kuzmitch?"

A heavy, oppressive silence began and lasted fully five minutes. Dukovski silently kept his piercing eyes fixed on Psyekoff's pale face.

The silence was finally broken by the Examining Magistrate. "We must go to the house and talk with Maria Ivanovna, the sister of the deceased. Perhaps she may be able to supply some clues."

Chubikoff and his assistant expressed their thanks for the breakfast, and went toward the house. They found Klausoff's sister, Maria Ivanovna, an old maid of forty-five, at prayer before the big case of family icons. When she saw the portfolios in her guests' hands, and their official caps, she grew pale.

"Let me begin by apologizing for disturbing, so to speak, your devotions," began the gallant Chubikoff, bowing and scraping. "We have come to you with a request. Of course, you have heard already. There is a suspicion that your dear brother, in some way or other, has been murdered. The will of God, you know. No one can escape death, neither czar nor plowman. Could you not help us with some clue, some explanation—?"

"Oh, don't ask me!" said Maria Ivanovna, growing still paler, and covering her face with her hands. "I can tell you nothing. Nothing! I beg you! I know nothing— What can I do? Oh, no, no!—not a word about my brother! If I die, I won't say anything!"

Maria Ivanovna began to weep, and left the room. The investigators looked at each other, shrugged, and beat a retreat.

"Confound the woman!" scolded Dukovski, going out of the house. "It is clear she knows something, and is concealing it. And the chambermaid has a queer expression too. Wait, you wretches, we'll ferret it all out!"

In the evening Chubikoff and his deputy, lit on their road by the pale moon, wended their way homeward. They sat in their carriage and thought over the results of the day. Both were tired and kept silent. Chubikoff was always unwilling to talk while traveling, and the talkative Dukovski remained silent, to fall in with the elder man's humor. But at the end of their journey the deputy could hold in no longer.

"It is quite certain," he said, "that Nicholas had something to do with the matter. *Non dubitandum!* You can see by his face what sort of case he is. His alibi betrays him, body and bones. But it is also certain that he did not set the thing going. He was only the stupid hired tool. You agree? And the humble Psyekoff was not without some slight share in the matter. His dark-blue breeches, his agitation, his lying behind the stove in terror after the murder, his alibi and—Aquilina—"

"'Grind away, Emilian; it's your week!' So, according to you, whoever knew Aquilina is the murderer? Hothead! You ought to be sucking a bottle, and not handling affairs. You were one of Aquilina's admirers yourself—does it follow that you are also implicated?"

"Aquilina was cook in your house for a month—I am saying nothing about that. The night before that Saturday I was playing cards with you, and saw you—otherwise I should be after you too. It isn't the woman that matters, old chap—it is the mean, nasty, low spirit of jealousy that matters. The retiring young man was not pleased when they got the better of him. His vanity, don't you see? He wanted revenge. Then, those thick lips of his suggest passion. So there you have it: wounded self-love and passion. That is quite enough motive for a murder. We have two of them in our hands. But who is the third? Nicholas and Psyekoff held him, but who smothered him? Psyekoff is shy, timid, an all-round coward. And Nicholas would not smother with a pillow—his sort use an ax or a club. Some third person did the smothering. But who was it?"

Dukovski crammed his hat down over his eyes and pondered. He remained silent until the carriage rolled up to the Magistrate's door.

"Eureka!" he said, entering the little house and throwing off his overcoat. "Eureka, Nicholas Yermolaiyevitch! The only thing I can't understand is, how it did not occur to me sooner! Do you know who the third person was?"

"Oh, for goodness' sake, shut up! Here is supper."

The Magistrate and Dukovski sat down to supper. Dukovski poured himself a glass of vodka, rose, drew himself up, and said, with sparkling eyes, "Well, the third person, who acted in concert with that scoundrel Psyekoff and did the smothering, was a woman! Yes-s! I mean—the murdered man's sister, Maria Ivanovna!"

Chubikoff choked over his vodka, and fixed his eyes on Dukovski.

"You aren't—what's-it's-name? Your head isn't—what-do-you-call-it? You haven't a pain in it?"

"I am perfectly well! Very well, let us say that I am crazy; but how do you explain her confusion when we appeared? How do you explain her unwillingness to give us any information? Let us admit that these are trifles. Very well. But remember their relations. She detested her brother. She never forgave him for living apart from his wife. She of the Old Faith—in her eyes he is a godless profligate. There is where the germ of her hate was hatched They say he succeeded in making her believe that he was an angel of Satan. He even went in for spiritualism in her presence."

"Well, what of that?"

"You don't understand? She, as a member of the Old Faith, murdered him through fanaticism. It was not only that she was putting to death a weed, a profligate—she was freeing the world of an Antichrist! Oh, you don't know those old maids of the Old Faith. Read Dostoyevsky! And what does Lyeskoff say about them, or Petcherski? It was she, and nobody else, even if you cut me open. She smothered him! Oh, treacherous woman, wasn't that the reason why she was kneeling before the icons, when we came in, just to take our attention away? 'Let me kneel down and pray,' she said to herself, 'and they will think I am tranquil and did not expect them.' That is the plan of all novices in crime, Nicholas Yermolaiyevitch, old pal. My dear old man, won't you intrust this business to me? Let me personally bring it through. Friend, I began it and I will finish it!"

Chubikoff shook his head and frowned.

"We know how to manage difficult matters ourselves," he said, "and your business is not to push yourself in where you don't belong. Write from dictation when you are dictated to—that is your job!"

Dukovski flared up, banged the door, and disappeared.

"Clever rascal," muttered Chubikoff, glancing after him. "Awfully clever! But too much of a hothead. I must buy him a cigar case at the fair as a present."

The next day, early in the morning, a young man with a big head and a pursed-up mouth, who came from Klausoff's place, was introduced to the Magistrate's office. He said he was the shepherd Daniel, and brought a very interesting piece of information.

"I was a bit drunk," he said. "I was with my pal till midnight. On my way home I went into the river for a bath. I was taking a bath, when I looked up. Two men were walking along the dam, carrying something black. 'Shoo!' I cried at them. They got scared and went off like the wind toward Makareff's cabbage garden. Strike me dead, if they weren't carrying the master!"

That same day, toward evening, Psyekoff and Nicholas were arrested and brought under guard to the district town. In the town they were committed to the cells of the prison.

A fortnight passed. It was morning. Magistrate Nicholas Yermolaiyevitch was sitting in his office before a green table, turning over the papers of the "Klausoff case." Dukovski was striding restlessly up and down like a wolf in a cage.

"You are convinced of the guilt of Nicholas and Psyekoff," he said, nervously plucking at his young beard. "Why will you not believe in the guilt of Maria Ivanovna? Are there not proofs enough for you?"

"I don't say I am not convinced. I am convinced, but somehow I don't believe it! There are no real proofs, but just a kind of philosophizing—fanaticism, this and that—"

"You can't do without an ax and bloodstained sheets. Those jurists! Very well, I'll prove it to you. You will stop sneering at the psychological side of the affair. To Siberia with your Maria Ivanovna! I will prove it! If philosophy is not enough for you, I have something substantial for you. It will show you how correct my philosophy is. Just give me permission—"

"What are you raving about?"

"About the safety match! Have you forgotten it? I haven't! I am going to find out who struck it in the murdered man's room. It was not Nicholas that struck it; it was not Psyekoff, for neither of them had any matches when they were examined. It was the third person, Maria Ivanovna. I will prove it to you. Just give me permission to go through the district to find out."

"That's enough! Sit down. Let us go on with the examination."

Dukovski sat down at a little table and plunged his long nose in a bundle of papers.

"Bring in Nicholas Tetekhoff!" cried the Examining Magistrate.

They brought Nicholas in. He was pale and thin as a rail, and trembling.

"Tetekhoff!" began Chubikoff. "In 1879 you were tried in the Court of the First Division, convicted of theft, and sentenced to imprisonment. In 1882 you were tried a second time for theft and were again imprisoned. We know all—"

Astonishment was depicted on Nicholas' face. The Examining Magistrate's omniscience startled him. But soon his expression of astonishment changed to extreme indignation. He began to cry and requested permission to go and wash his face and quiet down. They led him away.

"Bring in Psyekoff!" ordered the Examining Magistrate.

They brought in Psyekoff. The young man had changed greatly during the last few days. He had grown thin and pale, and looked haggard. His eyes had an apathetic expression.

"Sit down, Psyekoff," said Chubikoff. "I hope that today you are going to be reasonable and will not tell lies, as you did before. All these days you have denied that you had anything to do with the murder of Klausoff, in spite of all the proofs that testify against you. That is foolish. Confession will lighten your guilt. This is the last time I am going to talk to you. If you do not confess today, tomorrow it will be too late. Come tell me all—"

"I know nothing about it. I know nothing about your proofs," answered Psyekoff, almost inaudibly.

"It's no use! Well, let me relate to you how the matter took place. On Saturday evening you were sitting in Klausoff's sleeping room and drinking vodka and beer with him. Nicholas was waiting on you. At one o'clock Marcus Ivanovitch announced his intention of going to bed. He always went to bed at one o'clock.

When he was taking off his boots, and was giving you directions about details of management, you and Nicholas, at a given signal, seized your drunken master and threw him on the bed. One of you sat on his legs, the other on his head. Then a third person came in from the passage—a woman in a black dress, whom you know well, and who had previously arranged with you as to her share in your criminal deed. She seized a pillow and began to smother him.

"While the struggle was going on, the candle went out. The woman took a box of safety matches from her pocket and lit the candle. Was it not so? I see by your face that I am speaking the truth. But to go on. After you saw that he had ceased breathing, you and Nicholas pulled him out through the window and laid him down near the burdock. Fearing that he might come round again, you struck him with something sharp.

"Then you carried him away and laid him under a lilac bush for a short time. After resting a while and considering, you carried him across the fence. Then you entered the road. After that comes the dam. Near the dam, a peasant frightened you. Well, what is the matter with you?"

"I am suffocating!" replied Psyekoff. "Very well—have it so. Only let me go out, please!"

They led Psyekoff away.

"At last! He has confessed!" cried Chubikoff, stretching himself luxuriously. "He has betrayed himself. And didn't I get round him cleverly!"

"And he doesn't deny the woman in the black dress!" exulted Dukovski. "But all the same, that safety match is tormenting me. I can't stand it any longer. Goodbye. I am off!"

Dukovski put on his cap and drove off. Chubikoff began to examine Aquilina, who declared she knew nothing whatever about it.

At six that evening Dukovski returned. He was more agitated than he had ever been before. His hands trembled so that he could not even unbutton his greatcoat. His cheeks glowed. It was clear that he did not come empty-handed.

"Veni, vidi, vici!" he cried, rushing into Chubikoff's room and falling into an armchair. "I swear to you on my honor, I begin to believe that I am a genius. Listen, devil take us all! It is funny and it is sad. We have caught three already—isn't that so? Well, I have found the fourth, and a woman at that. You will never believe who it is! But listen.

"I went to Klausoff's village and began to make a spiral round it. I visited all the little shops on the road, everywhere asking for safety matches. Everywhere they said they hadn't any. I made a whole round. Twenty times I lost faith, and twenty times I got it back again. I knocked about the whole day, and only an hour ago I got on the track. Three versts from here. They gave me a packet of ten boxes. One box was missing.

"Immediately I asked, 'Who bought the other box?' 'Such-a-one—she was pleased with them.' See what a fellow who was expelled from the seminary and who has read Gaboriau can do! From today on I begin to respect myself! Well, come."

"Come where?"

"To her, to number four! We must hurry, otherwise—otherwise I'll burst with impatience! Do you know who she is? You'll never guess! Olga Petrovna, Marcus Ivanovitch's wife—his own wife—that's who it is! She is the person who bought the matchbox."

"You—you are out of your mind!"

"It's quite simple! To begin with, she smokes. Secondly, she was head and ears in love with Klausoff, even after he refused to live in the same house with her, because she was always scolding his head off. Why, they say she used to beat him because she loved him so much. And then he positively refused to stay in the same house. Love turned sour. 'Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.' But come along. Quick, or it will be dark."

"I am not yet sufficiently crazy to go and disturb a respectable, honorable woman in the middle of the night!"

"Respectable, honorable! Do honorable women murder their husbands? I never ventured to call you names before, but now you compel me to. Rag! Dressing gown! Dear Nicholas Yermolaiyevitch, do come, I beg of you!"

The Magistrate made a deprecating motion.

"I beg of you! I ask, not for myself, but in the interests of justice. I implore you! Do what I ask you to, just this once."

Dukovski went down on his knees. "Be kind! Call me a blackguard, a ne'er-do-weel, if I am mistaken about this woman. You see what an affair it is, what a case it is. A romance! A woman murdering her own husband for love! The fame of it will go all over Russia. They will make you investigator in all important cases. Understand, Oh, foolish old man!"

The Magistrate frowned and undecidedly stretched his hand toward his cap.

"Oh, the devil take you!" he said. "Let us go."

It was dark when the Magistrate's carriage rolled up to the porch of the old country house in which Olga Petrovna had taken refuge with her brother.

"What pigs we are," said Chubikoff, taking hold of the bell, "to disturb a poor woman like this!"

"It's all right. Don't get frightened. We can say that we have broken a spring."

Chubikoff and Dukovski were met at the threshold by a tall buxom woman, with pitch-black brows and juicy red lips. It was Olga Petrovna herself, apparently not the least distressed by the recent tragedy.

"Oh, what a pleasant surprise!" she said, smiling broadly. "You are just in time for supper. Kuzma Petrovitch is not at home. He is visiting the priest and has stayed late. But we'll get on without him. Be seated. You have come from the examination?"

"Yes. We broke a spring, you know," began Chubikoff, entering the sitting room and sinking into an armchair.

"Take her unawares—at once!" whispered Dukovski. "Take her unawares!"

"A spring—hm—yes—so we came in."

"Take her unawares, I tell you! She will guess what the matter is if you drag things out like that."

"Well, do it yourself as you want. But let me out of it," muttered Chubikoff, rising and going to the window.

"Yes, a spring," began Dukovski, going close to Olga Petrovna and wrinkling his long nose. "We did not drive over here—to take supper with you or—to see Kuzma Petrovich. We came here to ask you, respected madam, where Marcus Ivanovitch is, whom you murdered!"

"What? Marcus Ivanovitch murdered?" stammered Olga Petrovna, and her face suddenly flushed bright scarlet. "I don't understand!"

"I ask you in the name of the law.

Where is the body of Klausoff? We know all!"

"Who told you?" Olga Petrovna asked in a low voice, unable to endure Dukovski's glance.

"Be so good as to show us where your husband is!"

"But how did you find out? Who told you?"

The Examining Magistrate, emboldened by her confusion, came forward and said, "Show us and we will go away. Otherwise, we—"

"What do you want with him?"

"Madam, what is the use of these questions? We ask you to show us! You tremble, you are agitated. Yes, he has been murdered, and, if you must have it, murdered by you! Your accomplices have betrayed you!"

Olga Petrovna grew pale.

"Come!" she said in a low voice, wringing her hands.

"I have him—hidden in the bathhouse. Only for heaven's sake, do not tell Kuzma Petrovitch. I beg and implore you! He will never forgive me!"

Olga Petrovna took down a big key from the wall and led her guests through the kitchen and passage to the courtyard. The courtyard was in darkness. Fine rain was falling. Olga Petrovna walked in advance of them. Chubikoff and Dukovski strode behind her through the long grass.

The courtyard was wide. Soon they felt freshly broken earth under their feet. In the darkness appeared the shadowy outlines of trees, and among the trees a little house with a crooked chimney.

"That is the bathhouse," said Olga Petrovna. "But I implore you, do not tell my brother! If you do, I'll never hear the end of it!"

Going up to the bathhouse, Chubikoff and Dukovski saw a huge padlock on the door.

"Get your candle and matches ready," whispered the Examining Magistrate to his deputy.

Olga Petrovna unfastened the padlock and let her guests into the bathhouse. Dukovski struck a match and lit up the anteroom. In the middle of the anteroom stood a table. On the table, beside a sturdy little samovar, stood a soup tureen with cold cabbage soup and a plate with the remnants of some sauce.

"Forward!"

They went into the next room, where the bath was. There was a table there also. On the table was some ham, a bottle of vodka, plates, knives, forks.

"But where is—where is the murdered man?" asked the Examining Magistrate.

"On the top tier," whispered Olga Petrovna, still pale and trembling.

Dukovski took the candle in his hand and climbed to the top tier of the sweating frame. There he saw a long human body lying motionless on a large feather bed. A slight snore came from the body.

"You are making fun of us, devil

take it!" cried Dukovski. "That is not the murdered man! Some live fool is lying here. Here, whoever you are, the devil take you!"

The body drew in a quick breath and stirred. Dukovski stuck his elbow into it. It raised a hand, stretched itself, and lifted its head.

"Who is sneaking in here?" asked a hoarse, heavy bass. "What do you want?"

Dukovski raised the candle to the face of the unknown and cried out. In the red nose, disheveled and unkempt hair, the pitch-black mustaches, one of which was jauntily twisted and pointed insolently toward the ceiling, he recognized the gallant cavalryman Klausoff.

"You—Marcus Ivanovitch? Is it possible?"

The Examining Magistrate glanced sharply up at him and stood spellbound.

"Yes, it is I. That's you, Dukovski? What the devil do you want here? And who's that other mug down there? Great snakes, it is the Examining Magistrate! What fate has brought him here?"

Klausoff rushed down and threw his arms round Chubikoff in a cordial embrace. Olga Petrovna slipped through the door.

"How did you come here? Let's have a drink—tra-ta-ti-to-tum—let us drink! But who brought you here? How did you find out I was here? But it doesn't matter—let's have a drink!"

Klausoff lit the lamp and poured out three glasses of vodka.

"That is—I don't understand you," said the Examining Magistrate. "Is this you or not you?"

"Oh, shut up! You want to preach me a sermon? Don't trouble yourself. Young Dukovski, empty your glass. Friends, let us bring this—what are you looking at? Drink!"

"All the same, I do not understand!" said the Examining Magistrate, mechanically drinking off the vodka. "What are you here for?"

"Why shouldn't I be here, if I am all right here?"

Klausoff drained his glass and took a bite of ham.

"I am in captivity here, as you see. In solitude, in a cavern, like a ghost or a bogey. Drink! She carried me off and locked me up, and —well, I am living here, in the deserted bathhouse, like a hermit. I am fed. Next week I think I'll try to get out. I am getting tired of it here."

"Incomprehensible!" said Dukovski.

"What is incomprehensible about it?"

"Incomprehensible! For heaven's sake, how did your boot get into the garden?"

"What boot?"

"We found one boot in your bedroom and the other in the garden."

"And what do you want to know that for? Why don't you drink, devil take you? If you wakened me, then drink with me! It is an interesting tale, brother, that of the boot. I didn't want to go with Olga. I don't like to be bossed. She came under the window and began to abuse me. She always was a termagant. You know what women are like, all of them. I was a bit drunk, so I took a boot and heaved it at her. Ha-ha-ha! Teach her not to scold another time! But it didn't—not a bit of it! She climbed in at the window, lit the lamp, and began to hammer poor tipsy me. She thrashed me, dragged me over here, and locked me in. She feeds me now—on love, vodka, and ham! But where are you off to, Chubikoff? Where are you going?"

The Examining Magistrate swore and left the bathhouse. Dukovski followed him, crestfallen. They silently took their seats in the carriage and drove off. The road never seemed to them so long and disagreeable.

Both remained silent. Chubikoff trembled with rage all the way. Dukovski hid his nose in the collar of his overcoat, as if he was afraid the darkness and drizzling rain might read the shame in his face.

When they reached home, the Examining Magistrate found Dr. Tyutyeff awaiting him. The doctor was sitting at the table, and, sighing deeply, was turning over the pages of the *Neva*.

"Such goings on there are in the world!" he said, meeting the Examining Magistrate with a sad smile. "Austria is at it again! And Gladstone also to some extent—"

Chubikoff threw his cap under the table and shook himself.

"Devils' skeletons—don't plague me! A thousand times I have told you not to bother me with your politics! And you," said Chubikoff, turning to Dukovski and shaking his fist, "I won't forget this in a thousand years!"

"But the safety match? How could I know?"

"Choke yourself with your safety match! Don't make me mad or the devil only knows what I'll do to you! Don't let me see a trace of you!"

Dukovski sighed, took his hat, and went out.

"I'll get drunk," he decided, going through the door and gloomily wending his way to the inn.

the Russian detective story

— new style

And now a contemporary Russian detective story—also a story of straightforward detection, complete with physical clues, astonishing deductions, and in its own way (entirely different from Chekhov's), a "surprise solution."

Let us introduce the author, Lev Sheinin. In 1923, as a 17-year-old student at the Bryusov Institute of Literature and Art, his ambition was to become a writer. At that time, however, Moscow was in the midst of a crime wave, and Comrade Sheinin found himself mobilized by the Party as a Regional Court investigator. "If you want to be a writer," he was told, "what better way to learn about people and to store away plots! Besides, the Revolution should have its own Sherlock Holmeses."

How a teen-ager with no legal education could have been appointed a criminal investigator is, in the author's own words, difficult to understand today; but this took place in the early years of the Soviet Government when everyone with the promise of ability was drafted into service; and in Sheinin's case, after being trained in Criminal, Legal, Civil, and Labor Codes, he went on to a brilliant career as one of the leading criminologists in the U.S.S.R. So, as the author himself says, "Chance, which had made me a detective, thus also determined my fate as a writer."

The unnamed Soviet detective in "The Hunting Knife" is undoubtedly Lev Sheinin, writing about one of his own experiences as a real-life investigator. The story was part of Sheinin's book titled DIARY OF A CRIMINOLOGIST *(Library of Soviet Literature, Moscow). The stories in the book originally appeared in "Pravda," "Izvestia," and in Russian magazines; but neither the book nor "The Hunting Knife" has ever been published outside the Soviet Union, according to Liuba Solov, manager of the Am-Rus Literary Agency, exclusive American agency for Soviet authors.*

Here, then, is a very special "first" for EQMM—the first modern Russian detective story we have ever seen . . .

Editors' preface to this modern Russian 'tec on preceding page

THE HUNTING KNIFE

by LEV SHEININ

THE PAPERS WERE FINALLY SIGNED and there it stood, black on white, that A. Burov, Professor of Zoology, and his assistant Voronov were being sent to Kolguyev Island in the Barents Sea to conduct scientific research for one year.

Their colleagues at the University read the notice and laughed. The teachers and students knew only too well that the Professor and his assistant could not bear the sight of each other. The news that these two were to be sent to a deserted island for a year, where they would be thrown together twenty-four hours a day, prompted shrugs and smiles. Some said it had been done on purpose—a scheme to cool their tempers with the harsh climate.

"They'll come back friends," they said. "Just you wait and see—they'll be the best of pals."

But the two most surprised by the news were the men involved. It became known at the University that the Professor had spent a sleepless night when he discovered the name of his companion for the winter. And Voronov was no less upset.

Still, orders were orders, and several weeks later the two men set out for an island in the far-off Barents Sea, where they were to spend a long Arctic year together.

Their first letters arrived a month later. They wrote of their first impressions, the details of their journey, and their plans for the future.

"Everything would be fine," read the Professor's letter, "if not for the constant presence of this character, who definitely qualifies as a subject for scientific study by any zoologist. This young man continues to get on my nerves. Being here and unfortunately having to see him constantly, I am once again convinced that my original dislike of him was well founded."

Voronov, in turn, complained of "the absolute intolerance of the old grouch and the torture of being with him, day in and day out."

At the University they read the letters, chuckled, and wondered at the stubbornness of these two men in their indefatigable dislike of each other.

The other Professors argued about how long the groundless feud would last. The optimists said both would finally make up and even come to like each other; the pessimists contended it would be just the opposite. Several bets were made, and two quarrels broke out.

A month later, however, a brief telegram from Kolguyev Island informed the University that Professor Burov had been murdered by Assistant Professor Voronov.

The special investigator assigned to the case began by looking for a means of reaching the island. Meteorological conditions, unfortunately, made the journey impossible at that time of the year.

The investigator then radioed instructions to the Captain of an icebreaker cruising near the island. The Captain was to deliver the frozen corpse to Moscow, to interrogate the witnesses—if there were any—and to search the scene of the crime thoroughly. Voronov was to be brought to Moscow with all due precautions.

Three weeks later, the Captain delivered to the special investigator's office a man in his thirties with a lost and frightened expression—the chief, and only suspect, Assistant Professor Voronov.

"Please be seated," the detective said, looking Voronov over with cold curiosity.

"Thank you," Voronov answered quietly.

The detective had carefully studied the records of Voronov's past. In his thirty-two years, Voronov had lived honestly until the day he killed Burov. Voronov was undoubtedly a talented scientist. He had written several scientific papers and was firmly on the road to professional acclaim.

The questioning began.

"What in God's name made you murder the Professor?" the detective, usually a calm and self-controlled man, exclaimed.

Voronov shrugged helplessly.

"You see," he said in an apologetic, hesitant voice, "you see—well, the thing is, I didn't murder him."

"But he *was* killed?"

"Yes."

"Was there anyone at the scene of the crime except the two of you?"

"No, only the two of us. No one else was there—no one else could possibly have been there."

"In that case I can't see why you don't confess. You'll have to agree that if only two people are together and one of them is murdered, the murderer—"

"—must be the other," Voronov finished the sentence. "It's undoubtedly so. But I did not kill him. The terrible thing is that I realize the utter hopelessness of my situation. I have no chance in the world to defend myself. Of course, I've been—what is it you call it?—caught red-handed. If I were in your shoes, I'd never have a moment's doubt. I understand. I'm prepared for the worst—for the very worst. But I did *not* kill him."

And Voronov began to weep. He sobbed as strangely as he had spoken. This tall calm, cultured man wept like a child, helplessly, without anger, and touchingly. He did not at all intend his tears to move his interrogator. On the other hand, he made no attempt to hide them. He wept as simply as he had spoken, and just as unaffectedly.

"Pull yourself together," the detective said gruffly. "If you murdered him—and everything points to that—it's best to confess. If you did *not,* then defend yourself. Refute my arguments, explain your actions, present your side of the story."

Voronov's guilt seemed too obvious, too incontrovertible. All the evidence pointed to the fact that Burov had been murdered by Voronov and no one else. But to the investigator's amazement, Voronov, far from trying to defend himself, provided additional and extremely incriminating information without the slightest prompting. While continuing to deny his guilt, he went on hurriedly to disclose new circumstances, new facts, all piling up further evidence against him.

"When we came to the island," he said, "our animosity grew sharper. We tried to keep our emotions in check, but our hatred of each other entered every word, look, and gesture. It was very difficult to keep oneself always in control, and that, unfortunately, did nothing to help the situation. Professor Burov couldn't stand the sight of me, and I felt the same way about him. To tell you the truth, there were moments when I had half a mind to strike him, even to kill him. These thoughts began to torment me. They even found their way into my diary. I've brought it along. Here, read it."

With these words Voronov handed the detective a large notebook. True enough, among other entries were those which showed that more and more often Voronov had kept playing with the thought of killing Professor Burov.

"I really don't know," he continued, "but perhaps in the end I might actually have killed the Professor. Perhaps! But I did *not* kill him. This is what happened.

"That morning we decided to go duck hunting on a small lake in the center of the island. We went there by dogsled. Our driver was a Nenets named Vasya. Halfway there the sled broke down. We had about two miles to go, so we decided to continue on foot, while Vasya stayed behind to fix the sled.

"We arrived at the lake and began shooting. Then the ducks swam off to the far shore. I suggested that the Professor remain where he was while I went round to the other side to shoot from there. He agreed, and I set off for the opposite shore.

"I had a clear view of the Professor as he stood all alone on the other side of the lake, not far away. There was no one near him, and no one could have been. Of this I was sure. Then a shot rang out from the area where he was standing. I saw him jerk strangely and fall, and I ran back to him, wondering what had happened.

"When I reached him, the Professor was still alive, but unconscious. A hunting knife was plunged into his left eye to the very hilt. His rifle lay beside him.

"I lost my head, not knowing what to do for the unfortunate man. I tried to pull the knife from his eye, but could not—it had been driven in with great force. Then I ran back to where we had left the sled. Vasya was just finishing his repairs. I told him there had been a terrible accident. By the time we reached the lake, the Professor was dead. We took his body to camp, where we finally managed to get the knife out of the eye with great difficulty. That's all."

Voronov lit a cigarette, inhaling hungrily. After a brief pause he spoke again.

"So you see, it's hard for me to defend myself. I'm intelligent enough to see that everything in this case points to my guilt. In fact, I may even stand a better chance in court—for clemency—by confessing, by making a clean breast of it and sincerely repenting my crime. Yet I cannot do that. I did *not* kill him. I did not commit murder, although I can't prove my innocence. I have only one request before you arrest me. These letters are from my fiancee, and this is a letter I've written to her. Will you please send them to her?"

"No, I won't," the detective replied bluntly. "You can give the letters to her yourself. I'm not going to arrest you, Voronov."

There are cases in which the unusual solution, the sudden conclusion, does not spring from a chain of formal clues and evidence, from a logical sequence of data already established, from a final summary of the events. Often there are such dark and tangled labyrinths of facts and details of human relations, such a terrible piling up of all sorts of circumstantial evidence and chance occurrences, that the most experienced investigator finds himself ready to throw up his hands. In such cases his guiding lights are his intuition and experience, his perseverence and conscience, and above all, his humaneness. These will surely lead him to the truth in the end . . .

The detective had put himself in a very awkward position by releasing Voronov. On the one hand, Voronov's guilt seemed indisputable; on the other hand, the freeing of Voronov had been prompted solely by the investigator's intuition—by the fact that he believed the man's story despite all proofs to the contrary. He based his belief on those dim, vague, and unclear grounds which are formed within the soul, which do not always seem logical, which are so difficult to express in words, which appear as a result of the investigator's psychological and professional insight, and the keenness of his intuition. They are the fruitful outcome of many years of thoughtful and tireless work, of training in observation, of experience in criminology, and of the constant habit of analyzing events and characters.

The detective was convinced that Voronov had not murdered Professor Burov. But he had to prove it, and what is more, he had to solve the mystery of the Professor's death. Certainly Voronov could not be cleared of the murder charge simply because the detective was emotionally convinced of his innocence.

The autopsy was performed by Dr. Semyonov with his usual skill and care. His findings boiled down to two points. First, Professor Burov died as a result of injuries caused by the blow of a hunting knife, plunged into the victim's left eye; and second, the blow had been inflicted with a force greater than that of a human being's.

"What do you mean by 'greater than that of a human being's'?" the detective asked.

"I mean," Dr. Semyonov answered, "that the strength with which the blow was struck was greater than could be expected from an average person. But just how great that force was I cannot tell."

The detective examined the Professor's rifle. It was a Winchester and supplied nothing of interest to the case. The knife which inflicted the fatal blow was also quite ordinary—a cheap hunting knife with a wooden handle. But on examining it more closely, the detective discovered a small fault in the end of the handle, obviously the result of poor workmanship. The tiny tip of the metal rod by which the handle was attached to the blade protruded as a sharp point from the end of the wood, though it was barely perceptible.

The investigator ran his finger over the tiny point of metal, then suddenly sprang to his feet.

An hour later a group of hastily summoned experts—gunsmiths and hunters—crowded the detective's office.

"Tell me," he asked them, "what would a hunter do if he had a hunting knife with a wooden handle in his belt and found that a cartridge in his rifle had stuck in the magazine? For instance, if the cartridge became slightly enlarged from dampness or had a flaw—what would a hunter do then?"

The experts began to whisper among themselves.

"In such a case," one said, when they had finally come to a unanimous decision, "he would probably take his hunting knife and carefully tap its smooth wooden handle on the cartridge to ease it into the magazine."

"That's what I thought, too," the

investigator said. "Well, now, have a look at this knife. Notice the tiny metal point sticking out of the wood. Now, imagine that a hunter were to try to push the cartridge in with this knife. What do you think would happen?"

The experts examined the knife, noted the tiny metal protuberance, and reached agreement.

"This bit of metal," they said, "sharp and strong as it is, could easily play the part of a firing pin. If this knife were used to tap the cartridge, it might cause an explosion that would fire the rifle."

The detective turned to the gunsmiths.

"Tell me," he said, "if the cartridge had not fully entered the magazine and if, as a result of the hunter's carelessness, the rifle were fired, where would the main force of the explosion be directed? And how great would that force be?"

"The force of the explosion would be directed backwards, throwing the hand holding the knife back to the face. The force of the shot would be very great."

The detective heaved a sigh of relief. His theory had been confirmed.

Just then Dr. Semyonov entered the office. The investigator showed him the knife and told him what the experts had concluded.

"That's all very clever," Dr. Semyonov said slowly, "and even quite believable, if not for one small detail. Considering the length of the Professor's arm, his height, and the correlation of various parts of his body, his right hand would have wounded him in the right eye. And as you know, Professor Burov was killed by the knife entering his left eye."

The detective's solution, which had seemed so clear and correct, had fallen to pieces. But he was a stubborn man, so he continued his investigation. Back he went to the family of the dead Professor.

"Was there anything peculiar about Professor Burov physically?"

"No—nothing peculiar."

"Did you ever see the Professor use a scalpel?"

"Yes, certainly—he often worked at home."

"In which hand did he hold the scalpel?"

"In his left hand—the Professor was left-handed."

The detective almost danced with joy. There, at last, was the final clue!

Now everything seemed in order. The truth had been uncovered. Professor Burov's death was explained, and Voronov was cleared completely. The case could now be closed "For lack of evidence attesting to a crime."

But the Professor's brother came to see the investigator.

"I'm ready to agree that you are right and that my brother died as a result of his own carelessness," he said. "But where did the knife come from? My brother did not own such a knife. Whose knife was it? Until you answer that question, Inspector, I cannot consider the case closed."

Professor Burov's brother was certainly entitled to an answer.

The detective checked the supply list. In the huge pile of bills, lists, and receipts, among hundreds of items including ammunition, rifles, tents, canned goods, binoculars, pans, thermos bottles, axes, pliers, hammers, metal cans, kerosene stoves, thermometers, dishes, and a multitude of other things, the detective searched in vain for an item marked: *Hunting knife—4 rubles.*

Recalling that the expedition had sailed from Archangel after stopping there for several days, the investigator decided to go to that city and see what he could learn there.

He arrived in Archangel the next morning and immediately started on a tour of all stores that sold hunting knives. He was shown hundreds of hunting knives, expensive and cheap, Finnish knives, knives from Vologda, Kostroma, Vyatka, and Pavlovo-Posad—but not one of the kind he was looking for. Salesmen eyed their fussy customer in dismay; store managers shrugged, cashiers giggled—but nowhere could he find the knife he was seeking.

Finally, toward evening, he wandered into a small sporting goods shop on the Dvina Embankment. Almost the first thing he noticed was a hunting knife with a wooden handle—exactly like the one that had killed the Professor.

"How much does this knife cost?" the investigator asked.

"Three seventy-five," the salesman answered.

The detective called the manager and learned that only one cooperative made such knives, sending its entire output to this store. And yes, the knives had been on sale when the University expedition was in Archangel.

"We have sold many of them," the manager said, "but we can't remember all our customers."

The detective returned to Moscow. There, in Professor Burov's notebook, among hundreds of entries, he found the following: *Archangel. Hunting knife—3 rub. 75 kop. . . .*

"Sit down, Comrade Voronov," the detective said, smiling. "This is the last time I'll be summoning you. Kindly read the order to close the case. Sign here, to show you've received your copy."

Voronov took up the pen. Suddenly everything seemed to swim before him—the pen, the inkwell, the face of the investigator sitting across the table. But the investigator's words finally sank in. The young scientist realized that his horrible experience was now a thing of the past, that his innocence had been proved, that the uncommunicative man sitting across the desk from him had saved his life and his honor.

DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 279th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . a "first story" with a difficult theme for a beginner to bring off—yet the author handles it with finesse and commendable restraint . . .

Mr. Vassi was born in 1937 on Manhattan's East Side. His schooling was interrupted in his second year at college when he joined the Air Force. Later, he spent a year at Yale's Institute of Far Eastern Languages studying Mandarin Chinese, and three years in Korea and Japan as a translator. Since then he has received his B.A. from Brooklyn College, and at the time of this writing is working for his M.A. in Psychology at the New School for Social Research. Currently, he is a teacher in the New York City Public School System.

Mr. Vassi obviously has tales to tell—of the Air Force, of Korea and Japan, of schools and teaching. We hope to bring you some now that he has cracked the print barrier . . .

BROOKLYN GOTHIC

by FRED VASSI

HENRY P. LASKER SAT UNCOMfortably in the overstuffed chair. Cramped, he looked around the room with a marked distaste for the stolid Victorian furniture. Everything seemed as though it had been fashioned by heavy, aproned workmen in an earlier age. The pieces were all ponderous, covered with a dark-green ribbed material, and embossed with stylized chrysanthemums. There was a large oak table with leaves that folded under, and ceiling-to-floor curtains that let in neither light nor air. The total effect was heightened by a bowl of artificial fruit on the mantel, and a fat black cat sitting on the rug in front of the coffee table.

Henry and the cat had been exchanging glances of mutual hatred for five minutes when Mrs. Glaskell ruffled into the room.

"Here, Mr. Lasker, I hope I haven't kept you too long," she said.

She carried a large silver tray with all the implements for afternoon tea arrayed on it. She spoke in short gasps, and Henry surmised that it was owing to her age, and the exertion of carrying a heavy tray. She was well over 70, and quite frail.

He jumped to his feet to help, but she smiled him back with a gentle "Now, now." He sat down and maintained what he was sure was a politely responsive smile as she went through all the elaborate motions of the practiced tea drinker. Once again, Henry noted the ring she wore on her right hand. The diamond was large and a full spectrum of light passed through it as she poured the tea.

He smiled a bit more naturally. In a few hours Mrs. Glaskell would be dead, and the ring would be his. He speculated on how much other treasure the old woman had in the house.

"Tea is just fine, Mrs. Glaskell," Henry said. He thought tea was a particularly insipid drink, but it would be poor strategy to upset her in any way. He must be sure that she let him stay in the house until it got dark.

"What *is* she saying?" he thought. He had lost the thread of her conversation and now listened intently to catch up with it.

". . . so difficult to be all alone in a strange city. You know, at first, after the death of my poor dear husband, the thought of renting a room repelled me. But then a cousin came to spend a summer, and I got so used to company that I thought I might try advertising for a boarder. Of course, I speak to each prospective tenant at length. I'm an old woman, you know, and rather set in my ways, and I must be sure that . . ."

But Henry had stopped listening again. A sound like a creaking spring had distracted him, and a moment afterward he became aware of a strange smell. It was vaguely familiar but he couldn't quite place it.

Then he directed his gaze at Mrs. Glaskell again, and in so doing saw another cat stalking past the doorway. Involuntarily he crinkled his nose. Two of them! He had nothing against cats; they simply didn't appeal to him. He thought them sneaky, and slightly evil.

Mrs. Glaskell had seen him staring behind her and she looked to see what was there. "Oh, yes, that's Booty. And you've already met Michelle. I hope they don't bother you, Mister Lasker. They are such good company for me. I'm quite attached to them, you know."

Again Henry nodded and smiled. It was best to agree with anything she said. "Adorable creatures, indeed, Mrs. Glaskell, and such clean animals. Not at all like dogs." He said the last word in a deprecatory tone, with the knowing and superior look that cat fanciers share.

"Yes, I've got them perfectly trained. They use the cellar to—" Delicacy prevented her finishing the sentence and the missing word hung in the air uncomfortably for a few moments.

Finally Henry cleared his throat.

"Uh, might I see the—ah, room, Mrs. Glaskell?"

Seeing the room was his reason for coming in the first place. He had reached a point in life where the pleasures afforded by women had become largely academic, and the thrill of speeding horses ate more and more into his thoughts and emotions. The demands of the butcher and the landlord and especially of the bookie put too great a strain on his modest salary, and the landlord was the first to go. He had started looking for cheaper quarters.

He arrived with no other idea than renting an inexpensive room, but something about the stillness in this old Brooklyn brownstone had set his nerves to tingling. It was almost a sensual feeling, this being in a quiet secret place. When Mrs. Glaskell appeared, wearing the large diamond ring, Henry suddenly knew that he would kill her, and steal whatever valuables he could find.

With more coolness than he knew he possessed, he had quickly figured all the angles. The odds were very good. No one knew he had come to the house; she was an old lady living alone, and old ladies often slip in their bathtubs. He could then go through the house at leisure and depart in the dead of night. Indeed, he had difficulty not showing his excitement at the whole appealing plan.

"This is an old house, Mr. Lasker, but a livable one. I'm sure you will enjoy it. Oh, yes, I've decided to let you have the room. Of course, there are one or two things we must discuss. As I said, I'm an old woman and rather set in my ways. There are some things my age won't allow me to tolerate. I'm sure you know what I mean."

"Indeed, Mrs. Glaskell," Henry answered. "But you need have no worries. I live very quietly."

"I'm so glad. I'm sure we shall manage," she said.

He looked at every piece of furniture and furnishings as they walked upstairs. Silver candelabra—too big to carry. Jewels—probably concealed in her bedroom. Cash—if she keeps her jewels here, she may have all her cash hidden in the house. But where?

He suddenly realized he was holding firmly onto the bannister. He would have to be careful—leaving fingerprints would be a stupid mistake. She turned to him as they went back into the living room.

"Mr. Lasker, I hope you don't mind my asking, but there is one little favor I would be so pleased if you would do for me."

"Yes, Mrs. Glaskell. Anything."

"Well, I'm afraid I have become somewhat indulgent with my pets. I've accustomed them to a late snack, but sometimes I retire early and can't get to feed them, and then they're absolutely ravenous by morning. Would you take care of it for me when I miss a night? I'll just leave a note on the refrigerator."

She was obviously upset to have to make the request, but Henry was at his best. "No trouble at all, Mrs. Glaskell. I'd be happy to feed them, just before I go to sleep."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Lasker. You are a real gentleman." She paused for a moment. "Would you like some more tea?"

"Yes. Indeed. Tea is just right—it hits the spot."

She went into the kitchen to boil the water again, and Henry picked up a heavy statuette from the curio shelf. He stepped behind the door and waited for her. In a few moments she walked past, and Henry brought the metal statuette down on her head. She fell soundlessly to the floor.

From that point on Henry worked like a professional. He made sure there was no blood on the weapon. He wiped it carefully and put it back on the shelf. He carried all the tea things into the kitchen, emptied the teapot, and dumped the pan of boiling water. In five minutes the kitchen was clean and neat.

From then on it was pure method. Wipe all the furniture he had touched in the living room. Carry the body to the bathroom. Strip the body, hang the clothes on the nearby hook. Run water into the tub, throw in a bar of soap. Then into the tub with wrinkled old Mrs. Glaskell. Hold her under. Take plenty of time, wait for the bubbles to stop. Perfect.

Henry walked into the bedroom and took a deep breath. Everything had gone beautifully. From here on, if he were careful, he could maintain the order of the house. He found a pair of Mrs. Glaskell's stockings, put his hands into them, and using them as gloves, began to search.

An hour later he was richer by several thousands of dollars in jewelry. But he hadn't found a bit of cash except for a few coins in the dead woman's purse.

Suddenly the picture of the kitchen came back to him. He remembered a door in the rear. It must lead to the cellar. Of course, in a house this old, there would be a spacious cellar. He could visualize the dusty old trunk in the corner. He could see himself lifting the lid, see the piles of greenbacks stacked inside. Forgetting his caution for a moment, he ran to the kitchen. He yanked the door open and started down.

The stairs were wooden and rotted almost clear through. They had just barely held under the frail Mrs. Glaskell. Henry's weight proved too much and they splintered under him. He screamed and fell fifteen feet to a soft dirt floor.

He came to slowly, and his first impression was that of pain. Immediately he realized that one of his legs was broken. Then he was almost overcome by the smell. He almost gagged on it. It was the same smell he had noticed in the afternoon, only now it was closer and overpowering.

Suddenly he recognized it. Like the lion's house at the zoo—that same strong acid odor of cat.

He struck a match and the walls came alive with sparkling jewels. The flame burned a bit stronger and he could see that all the jewels were yellow, all were almond-shaped, all were the evil eyes of cats. He saw a dozen of Mrs. Glaskell's cats, her strong spoiled cats.

It was almost time for their evening meal, and Henry promised to feed the cats whenever Mrs. Glaskell retired early.

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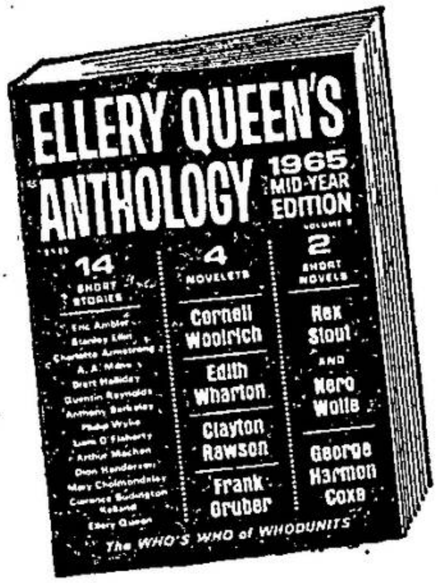
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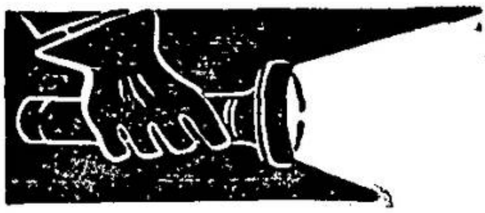

BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

EQMM was honorably represented on Mystery Writers of America's "Edgar" awards this year. The prize for best crime short story of 1964 went to Lawrence Treat's *H As in Homicide* (EQMM, March), with a scroll as runner-up to Dorothy Salisbury Davis' *The Purple Is Everything* (EQMM, June); and the Edgar for best first novel went to regular EQMM contributor Harry Kemelman for FRIDAY THE RABBI SLEPT LATE (Crown, $3.95). The major Edgar award, for best suspense novel of the year, honored John le Carré's already-classic THE SPY WHO CAME IN FROM THE COLD (Coward-McCann, $4.95; Dell, 75¢).

★★★★ **NECESSARY EVIL, *by Kelley Roos*** (Dodd, Mead, $3.50)

Witty, sprightly, sparkling comedy-thriller, tensely plotted and gayly written.

★★★★ **CUNNING AS A FOX, *by Kyle Hunt*** (Macmillan, $3.95)

John Creasey (pseudonymously) introduces psychoanalyst Emmanuel Cellini in an acute novel of middle-class tensions and murder.

★★★★ **WHO LIES HERE?, *by Ellis Peters*** (Morrow, $3.95)

Inspector Felse and his teen-age son (from Peters' Edgar-winning DEATH AND THE JOYFUL WOMAN, 1962) return in a fine combination of pure puzzle-making with sensitive treatment of emotional problems.

★★★ **THE INTERROGATORS, *by Allan Prior*** (Simon & Schuster, $5.50)

Long and sometimes heavy-handed, but an unusually moving and convincing realistic novel of the police (in Lancashire) as human beings.

★★★ **HOMICIDE BLONDE, *by Maurice Procter*** (Harper & Row, $3.95)

Chief Inspector Martineau and the Granchester force seek a girl-killer, in a first-rate procedural novel with an unconventional twist.

Other MWA Edgars include best fact-crime, Anthony Lewis' GIDEON'S TRUMPET (Random, $4.95); best juvenile mystery, Marcella Thum's MYSTERY AT CRANE'S LANDING (Dodd, Mead, $3.25); and a Special Award to Dr. Milton Helpern, Medical Examiner of New York, for his exemplary work in medical detection.

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **LLOYD BIGGLE, JR.**

TITLE: ***The Key to the Situation***

TYPE: Detective Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Percy, the old gardener, considered each possible suspect. A servant? The second wife? One of the four children? It was so hard to decide which one did it.*

IT WAS A YOUNG DETECTIVE, THE ONE with the sharp nose and the drooping left eyelid, who squatted down beside Percy McCue and asked the old gardener familiarly, "Which one did it, Pop?"

Percy scowled—not so much because of the familiarity but in resentment at the blunt statement of his own persistent, tortuous thoughts. Which one did it? *Which one?*

"Sure you didn't see anything through the study windows?" the detective asked.

"Didn't look through the windows," Percy growled. "Got better things to do than look through windows."

"Or hear anything?" the detective persisted.

Percy shook his head. His trowel worked busily, loosening the soil, scooping out a hollow, packing the gladiolus bulb into place.

"I don't suppose you'd tell us if you had," the detective said matter-of-factly. "Been with the Vanderhaas family a long time, haven't you?"

"Aye, a long time," Percy said. "Thirty-one years, come September."

Thirty-one summers of keeping the lawns trim, and the flowerbeds blooming, and the vegetable garden producing lavishly. Thirty-one winters of tending furnace, of shoveling snow from the curving drive, of bringing in cut flowers to keep the cold-weather gloom from the big house. Carl Vanderhaas' three children by his first wife had been surly, spoiled young adults when Percy made up the bridal bouquet for the young wife Carl was taking over their outraged protests. Now they were surly, spoiled grandparents, and there were four younger children to share the inheritance they had long since despaired of receiving.

Thirty-one years of carrying the younger Vanderhaas children piggyback, of building toys for them, of keeping a watchful eye on their games as they grew older, of lavishing his slow, meticulous care on house and grounds through all his waking moments.

And Carl Vanderhaas had reached a chipper, vigorous 82, and seemed likely to live forever—until a hammer crushed in his skull that cool summer morning.

Thirty-one years. No, Percy had not seen or heard anything. Surely there were worse crimes than murder.

"Let's go over it again," the detective said.

Percy sighed. They had already led him step by step through the whole 31 years. Had he ever had any differences of opinion with Mr. Vanderhaas? All the time, Percy told them frankly. Old Carl had the queerest ideas about landscaping and horticulture that Percy had ever seen in a man, and half of the gardener's time was spent in doing things over to try and please him; but they got along. For 31 years.

Percy had relived that fateful morning with them, minute by minute, until it seemed that he'd described each scoop of his trowel, each snip of his trimming shears, as he worked in the shrubs and flowers along the house. When he passed the study windows he could have looked in. He did not deny it. He could have looked in—but he didn't. Sanders, the assistant gardener, had been riding the power mower nearby. He could tell them that Percy had kept his nose in his work, where it belonged. He already had told them.

"Not even a glance?" the detective asked.

"Not even a glance," Percy said firmly.

The detective went away, finally, and Percy set the last gladiolus bulb, shook the dirt from his trowel, and made his slow, rheumatic way to the greenhouse.

Which one did it?

The detectives were still there at suppertime, wandering about the grounds, prowling through the house. They had emptied Percy's tool shed, sorted out the contents, and carried off anything that resembled a hammer.

The oldest son, Carl Vanderhaas II, had driven the 70 miles from New York as soon as he'd heard; the other older children were half a continent away. Surely the detectives wouldn't suspect them. The cook had been in her kitchen all morning. The two maids, Jean and

Carolyn, had been working together upstairs, getting the guest rooms ready for week-end visitors. They were out of it, as was Sanders.

It left only the second Mrs. Vanderhaas and her four children. It had to be one of them—*but which one?*

They ate supper together at the kitchen table, Percy and Sanders and the two maids and the cook. The cook had been with the Vanderhaas family for 18 years, and her eyes were red with weeping. The young maids seemed more resentful than saddened. Sanders was indifferent. He was leaving at the end of the month, had already given notice.

"Where was Mrs. Vanderhaas?" Percy asked suddenly.

All of them started. The cook looked away, and Sanders went on eating.

"In her room—she says," Carolyn told him.

"And Janet?"

"Out on the patio, reading a book —*she* says. And Sue—"

Sue had last been seen hours before the murder happened, having breakfast in bed. She said she hadn't left her room. Jimmy had been down in his model train room—*he* said—which seemed odd because he hadn't touched his trains for years. And Reggie had been reading one of his father's law books in the library—*he* said. The four children had come running from all directions when Mrs. Vanderhaas found the body and screamed. Any one of them could have done it.

But which one?

Percy pushed back his coffee cup, and refused a second piece of pie. He went into the dining room where the long table was set for dinner. The members of the family were eating in their rooms, those who felt like eating. Percy removed the flowers from the table and from the mantel, and moved on into the spacious living room. Usually he left this task for morning, when he brought fresh flowers; but the rooms would not be used this evening, and the brightness, the cheerfulness of the blooms seemed inappropriate now in a house of death.

Also, it was his only duty within the house. He needed to move around there, to think, to calculate.

He passed through the living room, the library, the sitting room that Mrs. Vanderhaas used for casual entertaining, and paused at the door of the study. It was locked.

The young detective materialized at his elbow. "What is it?"

"Could I get the flowers?" Percy asked.

"They'll keep, won't they? Or maybe they won't. All right."

The detective unlocked the door and opened it, and stood in the doorway watching Percy remove the flowers from the desk. Pink roses. *Capistrano,* Old Carl's favorite, every bloom perfectly shaped and fragrant. Sadly Percy turned away, and looked about the room.

"Where was he found?" he asked.

The detective pointed at the carpet. "There. Beside the desk. He didn't bleed at all. It was probably the side of the hammer that hit him, if it was a hammer, and his old skull cracked like an eggshell. Sure you didn't see anything? Hear anything? There must have been some kind of argument."

Percy shook his head.

"Of course, the lawn mower was making a lot of noise," the detective said meditatively.

Percy went out, and the detective locked the study.

He went back through the kitchen, where the cook and the maids were washing dishes, and in the rear hall he hesitated by the stairs. The flowers in the upstairs rooms were the maids' responsibility. He would have liked to go after them, and look around upstairs, but he wouldn't have been able to accomplish anything while the family was there.

Instead he went to his own room in the basement, removed the previous day's flowers from the row of vases, and replaced them with the flowers he'd just collected. It gave them another day of life, another day to display their—alas—too fragile beauty. He gave the last arrangement a caress with his stiff, arthritic fingers, seated himself in an old rocker, lit his pipe, and rocked.

Which one?

From what he'd overheard, and from the questions asked him, he knew it was the key that bothered the detectives most. Old Carl had an antique, key-locked safe in his study, and he kept the key hidden somewhere in his desk. They hadn't been able to find the key. A locksmith had been called in to open the safe, and as far as the detectives could tell nothing had been taken.

But the key to the safe bothered them. There had been a letter from Old Carl's broker in the morning mail—bad news about some stocks. It could have sent Old Carl to the safe to check on something, and the murderer could have walked in when Carl was about to open it, killed him, and taken the key, and then been interrupted before he could use it. Perhaps Percy's head had moved past one of the open windows at that moment, and scared the murderer off.

The detectives thought that, but they weren't sure about anything. They also thought the key might still be hidden in some secret niche in the desk.

They had turned the house upside down, even Percy's room, and searched everyone, and they were talking about bringing in someone to take the desk apart. "The key to the situation," one of them said, but not even he seemed to think that was funny.

There wasn't much money in the safe, but the murderer couldn't have known that. Old Carl kept his financial affairs to himself. Who could have wanted the key?

Mrs. Vanderhaas? Still lovely at

44, sad-eyed, already wearing black, she had, as far as anyone knew, loved her husband. No one had ever heard them quarrel, or even argue. But she had plenty of money in her own name, so she had no reason to kill her husband.

Percy crossed her name off in his mind with a toss of his head.

Jimmy? Jimmy had just graduated from college—a star athlete and an indifferent scholar, and much too handsome for his own good. He talked about going into the insurance business, but he needed money to get started. He had always got on well with his father, in an awkward sort of way. Still—he needed money. Old Carl could have refused him, could have wanted his son to aim higher than a small-town insurance agency. Yes, Jimmy could have done it.

Janet? She was 21, and an ugly duckling that had remained ugly. She was quiet and studious—not especially bright, but studious—and shy, quick to weep and slow to smile. She was studying nursing, which her mother hadn't approved of but her father had. He'd already resigned himself to her being an old maid, and maybe he thought a nurse stood at least one notch above a librarian, which seemed the only other career she was suited for. No one knew Janet very well, certainly not Percy. Could she have killed her father? Percy thought not. He crossed her name off—doubtfully.

Sue? She was 19, lovely as her mother, and she attracted boys the way a flower does insects—which was what too many of the boys were. She'd tried to elope twice when she was in high school, and she'd been packed off to a girl's college the previous fall, entirely against her wishes. She'd spent the summer sulking because she didn't want to go back. She was quick-tempered and rebellious. She could have been planning another elopement, could have killed her father for spite as well as for money.

Reggie? Percy shook his head. Reggie worshiped his father, and in his gruff, unaffectionate way Old Carl had reciprocated. Reggie had all the brains the other three children had missed out on. He'd just graduated from high school, and he was going to be a lawyer, like his father. The two spent hours together, the old man's voice droning on and on about some obscure legal point he'd used to dazzle an opponent in days long past, and Reggie hanging in breathless reverence on every dry, cryptic phrase. Old Carl gave him anything he wanted, and it was to Reggie's credit that he never wanted much. No, Reggie could not have killed his father. Percy crossed his name off—emphatically.

It left only Jimmy and Sue. *Which one?*

He rocked until midnight, smoking pipeful after pipeful in the still, oppressive darkness where nothing seemed real except the squeak of his chair. Not even himself. And still he could not make up his mind. What should he do—what could he do? Thirty-one years. There were worse crimes than murder.

Finally he went to bed, but he could not sleep. In the morning he was haggard and irritable, but no one noticed. All of them were haggard and irritable, even Sanders, who had pretended not to care.

After breakfast he went to the greenhouse and moved slowly along the rows of flowers, pottering about aimlessly. For the first time that he could remember, he was uncertain as to what he should do of a morning. Would they want fresh-cut flowers in the house? He supposed he should ask Mrs. Vanderhaas, but he shrank from it, dreaded the thought of troubling her with such a trivial problem.

He decided to go back to the house and see what the cook thought about it.

In the kitchen he met the young detective, the one with the sharp nose. "Mrs. Vanderhaas still thinks she heard her husband's voice yesterday morning," he said. "He was talking loudly for a moment, if not actually shouting. Still sure you didn't hear anything?"

"It could have been after I left," Percy said.

"Yes—"

"And there was the mower."

"Her room is right above the study, and she was reading by the window. If she heard anything, she heard it above the mower."

He looked searchingly at Percy, and Percy shook his head.

"Well—we're getting them all together in the library," the detective said. "When we're through with them we'll search the house again—if it's still necessary."

He went out, and the cook nodded at Percy and poured him a cup of coffee. They understood each other, he and the cook. While he sipped the steaming liquid he heard the family descending the front stairs.

Jimmy or Sue? Which one? If he did anything at all it had to be now, before they searched the house again.

The cook vanished into the pantry, and he set down the coffee cup and moved quickly into the hall and up the rear stairway.

At the top he hesitated, the glowing harvest of memories churning in his mind. The children's small triumphs and tragedies, the ponies he'd looked after for them, the lawn parties, their first sallies onto the tennis court and in the swimming pool. *Which one?* Jimmy or Sue?

Could Sue have swung the hammer? She might have poisoned her father's nightly highball, or torn the life out of him with her painted fingernails, but she would not have carried a hammer to the study. No, it had to be Jimmy. He should have seen that before—Jimmy.

He hurried along the hallway

and opened the door of Jimmy's room. The place was a mess. Even when Jimmy was at school it looked a mess, the maids said, with his cups and trophies and pennants and the worn-out athletic equipment he refused to part with.

Percy looked about wildly. Where would Jimmy have put the key? Somewhere the detectives hadn't looked, of course, but Percy had seen how thoroughly they searched.

He jerked open the top drawer of the bureau and ran his hand along the underside. If they'd turned these drawers over and dumped out the contents, as they had his, they would have seen it there. He stepped back thoughtfully, and then reached in to finger the underside of the top, above the top drawer.

He straightened up, tore open his shirt, and ripped the tape from beneath his arm. He was leaning forward again when the door swung open and the sharp-nosed detective leaped in to grip his hand firmly.

"I'll take that."

Resignedly Percy relaxed his grip. The key dropped into the detective's hand.

"Want to tell me about it?" the detective asked.

Percy took a deep, despairing breath, and smiled bitterly. He shook his head.

"Had the hammer with you, didn't you? You were repairing that rose trellis, I think. Vanderhaas was on his way to the safe when he saw you through the window. He'd just had bad news from his broker, and he raised the screen and leaned out the window and took it out on you. You swung the hammer, and as he fell back into the room the key dropped outside the house. Did you close the screen, or did it drop by itself? It doesn't really matter. Everything happened so fast that the guy mowing within thirty feet of you didn't notice a thing. You got rid of the hammer—buried it, I suppose—and hid the key in a flower pot in the greenhouse. We considered emptying all of them, but it would have taken a week."

Percy did not answer. He thought sadly that he'd been right in thinking the key was important. If he'd decided on Jimmy's room sooner, before they searched the house, they never would have suspected him. But it had been hard, deciding which one the detectives would believe did it.

"Come along," the detective said.

Percy walked beside him obediently. He dreaded facing Mrs. Vanderhaas and the children, but even so he held his head high as they descended the stairs. Old Carl's words rang in his ears. "Didn't I tell you a month ago to move that *viburnum tomentosum?* Danged if you aren't getting stubborn in your old age, and I've had all I can stand. You're through! Come in here, and I'll settle up with you."

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THE NAMEOLOGY MURDER

by A. H. Z. CARR

SOME PEOPLE DON'T BELIEVE IN premonitions, but I had one about Curtis Ebson the night he took me out to dinner, shortly before he was murdered. When I left him I said to myself, "Somebody's going to kill that man."

Ebson had a knack of stirring primitive emotions. Authors are said to be egotistical as a class—but the others I've met were angels of grace compared to him.

At first, while we were waiting for a table at the bar of Andre's, he was rather lively and interesting. We were talking about the theater. It turned out he had been an actor in his youth, and some of his experiences were amusing and unexpected—like the time he had to pretend to be dead and a fly walked up his nose.

Besides, it's always fun to be out with a man whom people recognize. Ebson's novel, *The Gauze Enchantment*, which my boss had published, had been at the top of the best-seller lists for 30 weeks, and most New Yorkers had seen his picture one place or another. Up to the time the Maitre d' beckoned us to a table, I was glad I had put on my black Givenchy (out of Ohrbach) and my twisted pearl rope (cultured), and had revived my down-swept hairdo (natural red).

Then the martinis must have taken hold—he had drunk four to my two—and the man inside came out. Sitting alongside me on the deep-cushioned bench he said casually, "How would you like to spend the week-end with me at my place in Connecticut?"

It took me a second to realize that he meant it. I said, "I couldn't tell how I liked it without trying; and I don't intend to try."

He seemed not to hear me. "It's a small house," he said, "but isolated, serene, and undisturbed, with a fine view of the Sound. Nobody else around except my houseman, and he's a self-effacing character, a Swiss."

I said, "I'm sorry to miss the view and meeting your Swiss houseman, but there are sacrifices a woman has to make."

He said, "Don't be satirical. You might find the experience rewarding."

He emphasized the last word, so I repeated, "Rewarding?"

"In more than one way—including the root of all evil." He snorted at his own humor.

I took a deep breath. "Unless I assume you're kidding, I'll have to leave now, and I'm hungry, so you're kidding."

"At least," he said, grinning, "we've got down to bedrock."

"I don't mind the rock," I said, "but I bar the bed."

We broke off long enough for him to give the waiter an order. Then he went right back to his sledge-hammer tactics. "I'll be frank with you, Sue," he said. "Ever since I first saw you in Cherington's office I've been looking forward to this talk. You remind me of one of the most adorable women I ever knew. Whenever I think of her I remember a mad little incident—"

He was determined to tell that story, and several others, all designed to suggest that he was a demon lover. For example, the woman I reminded him of was a sculptress, who had been married to a prominent lawyer when Ebson came into her life. One afternoon, Ebson said, he was in her studio when they heard her husband downstairs—a jealous type, who wasn't supposed to be back until evening. The wife was frantic. According to Ebson, he rose to the emergency, got on the model stand, and struck a statuesque pose. When the husband came in, the wife was intently modeling Ebson in clay.

I couldn't resist asking, "Didn't the husband suspect?"

"Of course," said Ebson, "but what could he do? Eventually their marriage broke up. But I had lost interest long before."

That was his prelude to a little lecture on the philosophy of love. "Let's recognize," he said, "that ships don't always have to pass in the night. If they sometimes drop anchor in the same harbor the night can be a lot more amusing."

I said, "With you, I get the feeling that the ships just collide, and the other one sinks."

He snort-laughed and said, "Not necessarily. I think I can guarantee you'd stay afloat."

"We're working the gag to death," I said, "but just for the record I'm setting my own course, and it isn't to Connecticut."

"Don't be too final about it," he counseled me. "I've got an idea that could make you a very prosperous young woman."

"That would have to be quite an idea," I said.

"All right, judge for yourself. For your information, three publishers besides Cherington have made offers for my next book. You might have a lot to say about who gets it."

I stared at him without smiling. "Are you sure you want to pursue this subject?"

He ignored that. "If I give the book to Cherington's, they stand to make half a million on it. And if my only reason for giving it to them is because you asked me to, you could get a nice cut out of them. Say ten per cent. Fifty thousand, at least."

Even though I had seen it coming, I was startled by the sheer impudence of him. "That's a nice round figure," I said, stalling while I searched for the right words.

"It matches yours," he said.

"There's a difference. Mine isn't for sale."

"You're not being realistic. Don't you think I know the score at Cherington's? *The Gauze Enchantment* saved their skin. The only reason my agent and I decided to let them have it was because they hadn't had a best seller in so long, and we knew they'd go all out for the book. It's no secret that before *Gauze* came along Cherington had to bring in that fellow—what's his name? Henning—in order to keep the business afloat. *Gauze* has sold 600,000 to date in hardcovers. They have their tongues hanging out for the next one. Cherington is a set-up for the deal. Don't you want to be rich? Do you want to be a secretary all your life?"

Pulling my rabbit's eyes away from his snaky ones, I tried for the light tone. "Your approach is different, I'll say that—but it isn't either gauzy or enchanting."

"Why should it be?" he said. "I'm twenty years older than you, I'm a busy man, and I haven't any time for romantic wooing. I pay you the compliment of assuming you're intelligent enough to face life as it is and enjoy what it has to offer."

I said, "The only thing I want to face right now is dinner."

The waiter had just arrived with our *Poulet Divan*, and a bottle of good white wine. I will say for Ebson that he knew how to order. For a while he took the pressure off and I enjoyed the food. But not for long. Some hectic and very personal little compliments made me realize that he was getting out of hand, or perhaps too much in hand—for about that time the sudden pressure of five fingers north of my knee made me spill my wine.

As I removed the hand that he had dropped under the tablecloth I realized he wasn't drunk. He was just testing—seeing how far he could go. I dug my nails into his palm and said with a pleasant smile, "I wouldn't do that again, if I were you."

That irritated him. Superficially, he wasn't unattractive, in a late-fortyish, Yul Brynnerish way—slim figure, hawklike features, close-cropped hair, intelligent clothes. Youthful—the only thing that suggested his age was a freckle or two on the backs of his hands—liver spots, I think they are called. His expression now was almost that of an enemy. In a cold voice he said, "Prude?"

"No," I said, getting mad, "but not lewd, crude, or stewed, either."

He looked at me steadily. "Those wisecracks will be your undoing, Sue. Men don't like smart-aleck women."

That stung, because he had a point. It's hard for me to control my tongue—almost impossible if there's a quip at the tip. I said, "That's my problem and I'll live with it."

After a while he said, "How long have you worked for Cherington?"

"Six years. Why? Planning to get me fired?"

"No, just curious. You must be nearly thirty."

"I'll thank you to keep a civil tongue in your head," I said. "I'm twenty-six."

"Anyway," he said, "you have a mind. And a good job. Your face isn't bad, either. You have a fairly good figure and pretty legs. Yet you're not married. I draw the inference that you're in love with your boss. Does he have an after-hours claim staked out on you?"

It wasn't so much the words as the poisonous tone that roused my red-headed temper. I said, "I'll count ten."

"Don't threaten me," he said, and yawned elaborately. "The fact is, you're beginning to bore me. I'm wasting my time. I suggest that you leave now."

At the moment I was only half through my chicken, and the waiter had just refilled my wine glass. I didn't throw it, but somehow it slipped through my fingers and into the lap of his pin-striped gray cheviot.

I apologized sweetly, picked up my bag and dyed squirrel, and left him cursing and dabbing at his trousers with a napkin.

It was then, as I was going out of the restaurant, that I had my premonition—that somebody was going to kill him. At that moment, I thought it might be me.

The next day, at lunch, I told Lucy Evans all about it. She laughed but she said, "Fifty thousand! Don't you think that one little week-end, Sue—"

"Not even if he paid in advance," I said. "I'd rather trust a cobra."

"Cobra," she repeated thoughtfully. "I wonder if that's in his name."

For a moment I thought I had misunderstood her. Lucy is a plump little brunette with a small voice and a wide-eyed fluffy manner that make it hard to believe she could be secretary to a high-powered motion-picture executive, the New York manager of Orbit Films. Her passions are pizza, which she has to resist, hairdos—she tries a new one every week—and the supernatural. Away from the office she lives 'way out in a twilight zone where astrologers tell you what palm readers leave unsaid.

Orbit's offices and Cherington's are in the same building, and Lucy and I often meet for midday salad and gossip. Just then I had a special interest in any office news she might have, for Orbit was after the motion picture rights of *Gauze*, and had already made a bid—$320,000—which Mr. Cherington had rejected in the hope of getting a better offer.

I knew that Lucy would tip me off if Orbit was going to increase its offer. But she didn't have any word about that. My evening with Ebson was what interested her. It was when I compared him to a cobra that her mystical side came out. She took a memo pad and pencil from her bag and wrote *Curtis D. Ebson.*

"No," she said after a moment. "It doesn't fit. Cobra has an 'a.' Wait, though. Maybe his middle name has an 'a.' What does the D stand for?"

"I don't know," I said. "What is this, anyway?"

"It's a new way of reading character," she said. "Better than numerology."

"What is?"

"This new method. Nameology, they call it."

"I never heard of it, and it sounds ridiculous," I said.

Lucy's glance at me said without words that I was terribly materialistic and not really responsive to the higher thought.

"It's perfectly sensible," she said. "People's characters, their traits and behavior have a great deal to do with their names." She had it all down pat, as if she had read it somewhere. "Partly it's hereditary. The surnames, you see, were originally taken because they described the person. And then the Christian names selected by the parents reflect their own characters, which the children inherit. Then again, it's partly conditioning, because a child is unconsciously influenced by its name. I mean, just look at any girl named Gwendolyn. But the name itself is the least of it. It's the words hidden in the name that are the keys to personality."

"Oh, Lucy, for heaven's sake," I said, but she paid no attention.

"For example, take D. D. Eisenhower." She wrote it out. "Some people would just see the obvious, like Eisen, which in German means iron. But the nameologists go deeper. They see at once that the key word is 'desired.' He was always wanted—desired for the big jobs. Or John Fitzgerald Kennedy," she added, writing. "There's 'Honey-Fitz' in his name—and that's what they used to call his grandfather, you know—a great politician."

"Sure," I said, looking at her pad. "But there's *d-o-n-k-e-y* in his name, too, and he certainly was not that."

"Well, what do you know?" she trilled. "That's the symbol of the Democratic party. Of course!"

She was absolutely serious. "What about you?" I said. "What's your key word?"

"Value," she replied promptly. "And love."

"Love? But there's no 'o' in Lucy Evans."

She blushed. "I've never told you before, but my real name is Ovenski. It's the name I grew up with."

I wrote it out and scanned it for a moment. "How about 'sly'? Or 'slunk'? Both are in your name. Are they part of your character too?"

That didn't bother her at all. "It's the first words you find, the really descriptive words, that are the significant ones. Try it yourself."

I printed *Sue Tyson* and hoped for the best, but the first word that popped out at me was "nosey." That shook me. It's a fact that my nose is a little too long for this age of plastic surgery and TV nostrils. I said foolishly, "What's in a name? My nose by any other name would look the same."

Lucy said, "Try again." But this time all I could see was "Yt's no use," which discouraged me.

We went back to Curtis D. Ebson. Immediately "curses," "rodent," "crudest," and "brute" appeared before my eyes.

"You see?" said Lucy triumphantly. "It works. When a man has 'brute' hidden in his name, watch out."

"All right," I said. "I'll give up my fifty grand. You've convinced me. The only thing I regret is that he doesn't have a 'p' in his name. Then we could have 'corpse.' "

"Oh, Sue," she said. "You're never serious."

When I got back to the office, Mr. Cherington was at his desk. I had scarcely taken off my coat when he buzzed me and said on the intercom, "Sue, will you come in please, and bring your book?"

From the deep-down tone of his voice I knew something had gone wrong. As I entered his office he said, "Do you know where I can reach Curtis Ebson?"

"I think at his Connecticut place. Shall I try him there?"

"In a moment," said Mr. C. "First you had better know about this."

He handed me a letter, imprinted at the top, *STERN, EAGER AND STERN*, with a midtown address, and signed by James L. Eager. It ran a solid page, and what it boiled down to was that they represented Mr. Daniel B. Rosencuist, of Martha's Vineyard, Mass.; that Mr. Rosencuist was the author, under the pseudonym of Scot Burnside, of the novel *Babes in Joyland*, published 26 years earlier by The Libido Press of Chicago, and the copyright of which was held by the author; and that he was bringing suit against Cherington & Co., as publishers of *The Gauze Enchantment*, and also against the alleged author, Mr. Curtis Ebson, on the ground of flagrant plagiarism.

Damages were being asked in the amount of $800,000, representing their estimate of profits and royalties earned by Cherington & Co. and by Mr. Ebson from *The Gauze Enchantment*, together with suitable compensation for depriving Mr. Rosencuist of the status and renown which would have been his if the book had been republished under his name, as had been his intention.

"If you will telephone me for an appointment at my office," Mr. Eager's letter went on, "I shall be glad to talk with you and put into your hands a copy of *Babes in Joyland*, so you can compare the two works for yourself. You may also examine the contract for the book between The Libido Press and Mr. Rosencuist, and the copyright certificate which is still in force. If you wish to bring your attorney with you, please feel free to do so.

"A copy of this letter has been sent to Mr. Ebson at his home in West Harbor, Conn."

My mind didn't want to grasp the meaning of that letter. Just to say something, I asked, "Is there really a publisher called The Libido Press?"

Mr. C. squinted, the way he does when he's trying to remember something. "There was, years ago. Pornography was their specialty, as I recall. They've been out of business a long time."

"Would Ebson do a thing like that?" I said, but I knew the answer.

"Let's call him and find out," said Mr. C. grimly.

I dialed Ebson's house, a voice answered in a thin foreign accent, and finally Ebson came on the wire. I didn't speak to him—just handed the phone to Mr. C., and got on an extension. He said, "Curtis? Have you received a letter from a lawyer named Eager?"

After a pause Ebson said, "Yes. It just arrived."

"I want a straight answer, Curtis. Is there anything in it?"

Another pause. Then Ebson said, "I don't want to discuss it on the phone."

"Listen," snapped Mr. C. "I want you in here this afternoon."

"Don't take that tone with me," said Ebson.

Mr. C. drew a long breath and said, "We've got to decide on a course of action. Can you be here at two this afternoon?"

"Who else will be there?"

"I'll ask my attorney, Jim Forrest, to join us."

"Nothing doing. I hate that stupid oaf."

"Let's not waste time arguing," said Mr. C. "I'll see Forrest later. Then the only other person present will be my secretary, Sue Tyson."

"No. If I come it's just you and me."

"All right," said Mr. C., and hung up.

I said, "Don't you think you ought to have a transcript of what you and he say? We could bring in a tape recorder—"

He shook his head. "I wish we could, but he wouldn't stand for it."

"Would he have to know?" I said, but when Mr. C. just looked at me, I added, "Sorry. Shall I call Mr. Forrest first?"

His face looked so drawn and haggard that it was all I could do to keep my maternal instincts down —and he nearly forty. He was a tall, strong, athletic man, with an aggressive nose and chin, and a sort of aristocratic manner. The fact that he had been a widower for years didn't lessen his charm.

Forrest's secretary said that he would be in court until mid-afternoon. I said I would call back, then telephoned Eager's office, and connected him with Mr. C. Eager was courteous, almost friendly. He said if Mr. C. would like to come over right away he would be glad to talk with him, and he would drop everything else. Mr. C. agreed, and told me, "You had better come along, Sue. I may want you to make notes."

As if our state of mind was not low enough already, before we could leave the office we had a visit from Henning. As Mr. C's partner, who had brought money into the firm two years earlier, Henning was a deeply imbedded fishhook. I mean it hurt to have him in, but it would have taken major surgery to get him out.

It was usually hard to judge Henning's state of mind from his expression. It sometimes seemed to me that he didn't have features so much as punctuation marks—periods for eyes, a broad twisted nose like an ampersand, and a hyphen instead of a mouth—all set in narrow parentheses.

But this time there was no mistaking his mood. He had a manuscript in his hand and he said to Mr. C., "I understand you've okayed this for publication."

I recognized the manuscript—*The Quest for Identity*, by a well-known psychoanalyst. Our Editorial Department had thought well of it. Mr. C. said, "Yes. It's a good piece of work and it deserves to be published."

"Maybe so," said Henning, "but not by us. It's too highbrow. We couldn't sell 2000 copies. It's a sure loss."

"I think it would sell better than that," Mr. C. said, "and besides, we need a few scholarly books on our list."

"Scholarly be damned!" Henning was working himself into a tantrum, and if I had been Mr. C. I would have walked out on him. "Don't give me the stuff about the Cherington policy being to subsidize good books with the profits on best-sellers. That policy ran you into the ground before we got *Gauze*."

"Calm down, Fritz," said Mr. C. "Leave the manuscript there. I'll look at it again. But just remember, I have the final say on editorial policy."

"I remember it only too well," said Henning. "If it hadn't been for me, you would have rejected *Gauze*. Then where would we be?"

"Perhaps better off than we are now," said Mr. C., and handed Eager's letter to Henning. "Read that, and I'll talk to you about it this afternoon. Right now I have an appointment. Ready, Sue?"

Henning, his eyes on the letter, said, "Paul! Wait! For God's sake—" But Mr. C. took me by the arm and we headed for the elevators.

The meeting with Eager was everything I feared it would be. Eager was a little man with a bald head and spectacles, and he did not fool around. Mr. C. examined Rosencuist's copyright certificate; then The Libido Press contract, signed by Ernst C. Dubois as President and Daniel B. Rosencuist as author, using the pseudonym of Scot Burnside; and finally the book itself, in plain black covers with faded gilt lettering—*Babes in Joyland*, by Scot Burnside.

"I may say," said Mr. Eager, "that we have located Mr. Dubois, who is now living in Mexico. He has vouched for the authenticity of the contract and is ready to testify accordingly, if it should be necessary. Now here is a copy of *The Gauze Enchantment*. Those strips of paper sticking out of the two books indicate some of the passages that correspond. I'm sorry to have to tell you that your author Ebson has literally lifted most of *Babes in in Joyland* without bothering to change anything but the names of the characters, and update a few passages to give them a contemporary effect."

Mr. C. kept silent while he glanced through *Babes in Joyland*. Looking over his shoulder, I noticed a few black-and-white illustrations, and could hardly keep from whistling. They made Henry Miller seem old-fashioned.

After a few minutes, Mr. C. sighed and said, "James Forrest is my lawyer. I think I had better let him pick up the problem at this point."

"Very good," said Eager. "My client has given me full powers to arrange a settlement—if his terms are met. He does not want to embarrass you with a court action unless it becomes necessary."

It was all so gentlemanly I could have screamed.

When Ebson arrived I showed him into Mr. C.'s office without a word and closed the door behind him.

Then I sat down at my desk, got out my notebook, and flicked the switch on my intercom, with the volume turned down low. There was no reason for me to bother Mr. C. by telling him that I had previously pressed the corresponding switch on his box. I just hoped that neither he nor Ebson would notice.

Mr. C. started off very quietly. "Before we get down to cases," he said, "I think I'm entitled to know exactly how this happened."

Ebson made a snorting noise. "Damned bad luck, that's all," he said. "I thought it was foolproof."

"Foolproof!" said Mr. C. "Are you mad?"

"Do you want the facts or don't you?" Ebson said.

"I do."

"All right then. The thing that really gets me is, if I had waited another two years the original copyright on *Babes* would have expired. Nobody would have bothered to renew it and they couldn't have touched us. That's the trouble with being hard up. You can't afford to wait for your opportunities to ripen."

"Get to the point," said Mr. C.

"Well," Ebson said, "it must be twenty-six years ago that I got hold of a prepublication notice for that book. It was published in a very small edition. Compared to it, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was supplementary reading for convents—at least, that's what the publisher claimed. So I sent for a copy. I wasn't sorry. For those days, it was pretty hot stuff." He snorted again. "And it doesn't seem to have lost its aphrodisiac qualities, to judge by the sales of our book."

I could imagine Mr. C. wincing at that "our," but he didn't interrupt.

"A few days later," Ebson went on, "I read that the Post Office had classified *Babes* as obscene literature. After that I got a letter from the man who owned The Libido Press—Dubois, I think his name was, or something like that. He enclosed a check for the price of the book, and asked me to return my copy, express collect. He said that only a few copies had been distributed, and that owing to the government's attitude it was important for him to get them all back, but not by mail.

"I didn't see why I had to return the book—or the check, for that matter. I hadn't asked for it, and every dollar counted in those days. Later, another letter came from this Dubois, saying that mine was the only copy that hadn't been returned, and wouldn't I please send it back? I ignored that letter, too."

He seemed to be enjoying himself—as if he weren't in just as much trouble as Mr. C. "Next thing, The Libido Press was hit with a big fine for sending obscene matter through the mails, and when Dubois couldn't pay, his firm went bankrupt. The papers said he would have gone to jail except that the government relented because he had recalled all copies and destroyed the entire edition. Even the author, Burnside, had turned over his copies. Nothing was said about one copy, mine, being extant."

From Ebson's voice you would have thought that nothing could have pleased him more. I was taking it all down, in the hope that he was hanging himself with every word and getting Mr. C. off the hook.

"Every time I saw that book on my shelves in the last few years," he continued, "I had the notion of doing something with it after the copyright expired. Aside from the sex angle, it has a lot of vitality. The obscenity wouldn't matter. Who knows what's pornographic any more—or cares? The important thing was that nobody had a copy except me."

"But for God's sake," cried Mr. C., "it was another man's book!"

"Don't give me that!" snorted Ebson. "You can't show me an author who isn't a plagiarist. The old gag about an author being a man who remembers everything he reads and forgets where he read it, hits the bull's-eye. Most authors work overtime forgetting where they borrowed their best material. Look at Shakespeare. Are you trying to take a holier-than-thou attitude with me? And you a publisher?"

"I won't talk ethics with you," said Mr. C., "because you evidently don't know the meaning of the word. But let me ask you this: didn't you realize the risk you were taking?"

"Sure there was a risk, since the copyright was still in force. But I couldn't wait. I needed money. I had to do something in a hurry. I knew that *Babes* was sure-fire material for an advance. So I decided to go ahead. Since I had the only copy, who could prove anything?"

"Except that it turned out that the author had one, too. How could you take the chance, with him alive?"

"That's where the hard luck comes in. It occurred to me that he might have held out a copy, but I thought he was dead. Not being a complete fool, I hired a detective agency to run down Scot Burnside before I went ahead. They reported that his real name was Rosencuist, and that he had disappeared without trace, except that the War Department had a record of a Daniel Rosenquist, with a *q*, missing in action in Germany, years ago. Only relative, his mother, living in Allentown, Pennsylvania, and long since dead. That looked good enough, didn't it? So I decided to go ahead. I typed the whole book myself—and what a chore that was!"

"Do you expect me to feel sorry for you?" said Mr. C.

I could almost hear Ebson shrug. "You publishers are all alike. You latch on to a creative artist, you pay him an advance that is barely enough to keep body and soul together, not even enough to afford a typist, and then you expect him to produce great literature in two clean typewritten manuscripts, for your profit. Meanwhile you sit in your plushy paneled office, and when you want to write a letter you call in your pretty red-headed secretary and look at her legs while you dictate. Speaking of that, I've been meaning to ask you; do you have any objection if I take an interest in that girl out there?"

I don't think I've ever listened harder for a reply. "Leave Miss Tyson alone," said Mr. C., in a stern voice.

"Dog in the manger," said Ebson, laughing. "Well, for your information, I've already beaten your time. A cinch. The first time I asked her, she came out to West Harbor for the week-end, and we made beautiful prose together. Her heels are rounder than you realize."

The point of my pencil broke. I wanted to rush into Mr. C.'s office and scratch Ebson's eyes out. I wanted to scream at him over the intercom. But I just sat there, ready to burst, with the blood pounding in my head, and my face hot.

When I picked up another pencil and tried to concentrate on my notes again, Mr. C. was saying, "Don't push me too hard, Ebson, or I'll knock your teeth in."

"Take it easy," said Ebson. "You're in this mess with me, remember? Suppose I tell the public that you knew all the time that my book was a plagiarism."

For a little while Mr. C. was silent. Then he said bitterly, "It shows what happens when a man departs from his principles. I knew I should have rejected your manuscript when it came to my desk."

"Oh?" said Ebson. "A little hindsight goes a long way, doesn't it?" The sarcasm dripped from his words, like snake venom.

Mr. C. drew in his breath audibly and let it out again, but he still didn't raise his voice. "You're guilty of plagiarism, but I admit I was guilty of bad publishing."

Ebson said, "I see. Now you don't like *Gauze*. After all the nice things you said about it, too."

"What I said about it, if you recall," said Mr. C., "was that the book had a certain morbid power, that it held the attention, and that I thought it would sell. What I I didn't say, except to myself, was that it was a kind of sexual nightmare—fundamentally cheap and evil."

Ebson snorted or perhaps laughed—it was hard to tell which. "I might resent that if I had really written the book," he said. "Why the hell did you publish it, then?"

Mr. C. didn't answer—but I knew why. Cherington's had always been a quality publishing house, priding itself on the dignity of its output. But sales had been slipping badly, and when *Gauze* came out of the blue, it had seemed like manna from heaven—or, being the kind of book it was, womanna. Ebson's agent, Emmanuel Dryfoos, said that he had given us first crack at the manuscript because it would do better if published by a small house with a big reputation than by one of the big assembly-line publishers, and our editors had thought Dryfoos was right. They admitted that *Gauze* had some super-torrid passages, but felt the writing was good enough to prevent the reader from feeling ashamed to own the book. Although Ebson's previous writing record—six published novels none of which had sold well—wasn't encouraging, they felt he had hit the jackpot this time, and the chance was too good to miss. Even at that, it took Mr. C. several days to make up his mind. But Henning was pushing him hard to accept the book, and after looking at his financial statement again, Mr. C. made a businessman's decision and agreed to publish.

A change came into Mr. C.'s voice—a taut steel-wire note—when he made his next remark to Ebson.

"I'm prepared to take my medicine," he said. "Are you prepared to take yours? In case you've forgotten, our contract makes you wholly and solely liable in the event of a suit for plagiarism."

"Be your age," said Ebson. "Rosencuist is suing both of us, but as the publisher you have the original responsibility. The situation is that if he collects from you, you can then sue me. Well, go ahead. Sue me."

"I intend to," said Mr. C. "This office to date has paid you nearly $300,000 in royalties. I expect to get it back."

"Don't make me laugh," Ebson said. "Taxes have taken about half of what you paid me. And I've spent a lot. You're welcome to the rest—if you can find it."

There was a little pause. "I ought to kill you," Mr. C. said. "Maybe I will."

"Don't threaten me," said Ebson. I could hear him push his chair back and stand up. "I've got a right to gripe, too. If you knew how to run your business, by now we could have sold the movie rights of *Gauze* to Orbit Films and we might have had enough to buy off Rosencuist. But no, you insisted that by waiting we could get more, and that idiot Dryfoos thought you were right. Now see where we are. As a publisher, Cherington, you're a dope."

That was not only unreasonable, it was insulting. Apparently Mr. C. couldn't bottle up his frustration any longer. The next sounds I heard were two short thuds, followed by a crash, as of a body falling.

It took me only three seconds to circle my desk and head for Mr. C.'s office, but before I got to the door, Ebson had flung it open, and with a hand to his jaw, and without saying another word, he rushed out of the office and down the corridor.

Mr. C. stood in the doorway of his office rubbing his knuckles, with a satisfied look on his face. I said, "If you hadn't hit him, I would have."

His expression changed when he looked at me, but he didn't speak. I said, "This is no time to worry about little things, but I'd like you to know that Ebson lied about me."

"Yes, of course," he said. It wasn't a satisfactory reply. Then he looked up and said, "Were you listening?"

"Over the intercom," I admitted. "I thought you wouldn't mind, so long as you didn't know about it. There was always the chance that he would say something that could be used against him."

"I see," he said coldly, making me feel like a dishonorable gnat. Then all at once he smiled, and patted my arm. "Don't worry your lovely head," he said. "Since you took notes, you might as well transcribe them, a single copy, and let me have it. First, though, try Jim Forrest again."

Within an hour Forrest was in our office, and I sat in to take notes. He always made me think of a nervous halfback who was a little out of training. Perhaps the reason he seemed tense for so big and beefy a man is that he had run through three wives in seven years, and it was rumored that he was paying alimony to all three. I don't think I would have picked him as a lawyer myself, but he and Mr. C. belonged to the same clubs and liked each other. It occurred to me as I opened my stenographic pad that I was probably the only secretary in New York at that moment in a conference with two eligible and successful men, and feeling glum about it.

Mr. C. brought Forrest up to date, omitting only Ebson's references to me. When Forrest heard about the left to the stomach and the right to the jaw, he grinned and said, "Nice going. I'd like to do that myself."

"I didn't realize you knew him," said Mr. C.

"It's a long time since," said Forrest. "Well, let's cut the cackle and get to the eggs. How much have you earned on *Gauze* so far?"

"Before taxes, nearly $400,000."

Forrest whistled. "Add the money you've paid Ebson, and the book has earned nearly $700,000. They're asking only $100,000 above that for damage to reputation and so on. Of course I'll explore the thing thoroughly before taking any steps, but I'm bound to tell you, Paul, that unless there's some aspect of this thing I don't see, I think they could get their $800,000 if the case came to court. If I were you I'd try for a settlement out of court."

"I can't, Jim," said Mr. C. "The business hasn't got that much and neither have I." Forrest must have thrown a questioning glance in my direction, because Mr. C. added, "Sue knows all about my situation. We can speak freely."

"Can't you get the money from Henning?" asked Forrest.

Mr. C.'s lips twisted in a sad smile before he said, "Yes, I can. But that's exactly what he's waiting for — a chance to get control of the business and push me out. I think I'd rather try everything else first."

There was a kind of gray silence then. After a while Forrest said, "There are two things we can do. One is to make sure Ebson doesn't run out on us. He may already have transferred his money to some foreign country. Probably Rosencuist's lawyers are taking steps to freeze Ebson's assets, but if they haven't, I will. Our only other recourse is Rosencuist himself. If he's a reasonable man, maybe he'll consent to some kind of deal. We can try, anyway."

It was late afternoon when he left. Mr. C. looked at me and said, "I need a drink. How about you?"

"I'll be right with you," I said.

We went down to a pleasant little restaurant around the corner from our building. In all the years I had worked for him, this was the first time we had ever slipped out for cocktails. A few times when we had worked late he had taken me to dinner, but those were only meals, not dates.

I wouldn't say that I resented his impersonality, but it certainly didn't do much for a girl's self-confidence. He carefully gave me no encouragement whatever for thinking of him except as a boss. The one occasion on which he had asked me to his apartment on East 64th Street was when he had a cold, and wanted to dictate replies to his mail. Then there had been a moment after a Christmas office party when he kissed me—a little more than seasonally, I thought at the time—but then he had to spoil it with a warm handclasp and a compliment.

Not that he was less than masculine. His women friends often telephoned him at the office, and at any given time at least two of our female novelists were sure to be in love with him. The only comfort I could find in his attitude was the possibility that he thought enough of me as a secretary not to want to tamper with the relationship.

Sitting at a table in the dimly lighted restaurant, we solemnly clinked our martini glasses, and he was saying, "Here's confusion to plagiarists," when someone got off a stool at the bar and came over to our table. I barely had time to recognize Fritz Henning when he pulled a chair up to our table and sat down without being invited.

His first words were, "What's the idea, Paul? Why didn't you have me in on the meeting with Ebson? I saw him leaving the office. Am I your partner or not?"

He was a little drunk—about par for that hour of the day—and spoiling for trouble. I've noticed that thin, sandy-haired men often show wicked tempers when they drink.

Mr. C. said, "I wanted to have all the facts before talking with you, Fritz."

"The hell with that," said Henning. "What's the situation? Are we hooked, or aren't we?"

"I think we are," said Mr. C. "Ebson admits he stole his book from Rosencuist's."

"Great!" Henning sneered. "That's simply great. I thought famous publishers like Paul Cherington were supposed to be too smart for that kind of fraud."

When Mr. C. didn't answer, I did. "That's not fair, Mr. Henning!" I burst out. "Ebson is an established writer. He's never been known to plagiarize before. And nobody ever heard of *Babes in Joyland*. How could Mr. Cherington or anyone else be supposed to know there was such a book?"

He gave me a slow withering smile. "Nice to have a pretty defender like Miss Tyson, Paul," he said. "I envy you. But if we're hooked, as you say, where do you expect to find the money?"

"I don't know," said Mr. C.

"You don't." Henning let out a short laugh. "I do. I'll tell you what, Paul. It's too late this afternoon, and you've got your cute little trick with you, but I'll be glad to see you tomorrow morning. In my office. No, perhaps in yours." He laughed again. "It really doesn't make any difference any more, does it?" And he walked out.

"Let's have another drink," said Mr. C. softly. Then he added, as if to himself, "What the hell am I going to do?"

It struck me it would be best to take his mind off his troubles, if only for a few minutes, so I said the first thing that came into my mind. "Have you ever played Nameology?"

He said he hadn't, I showed him how and he tried to be interested. We tried "Paul Cherington." He came up with "panther" and he actually laughed when I found "laughter" in his name.

Fritz Henning gave us "tiger," James Forrest "storm" and "roast." He found "stony" in Sue Tyson, and I assured him it modified broke, not heart.

Between names I rattled along, not giving him a chance to talk much, telling him about Lucy Evans and her superstitions, until almost an hour went by. We had stopped drinking after the second martini, and neither of us was the least bit tight when we said goodbye on the sidewalk outside.

When he took my hands in his and said, "Sue, thank you," I could have cried—I was so pleased and so sorry for him.

About nine that night, while I was washing my hair, the telephone rang. At the other end Mr. C., sounding excited, said, "Sue, can you get away? I mean right now?"

I made a hasty calculation—hair—clothes—taxi—say, one hour. "Would forty minutes be all right? Unless you're looking for a mermaid with sopping hair."

"Oh," he said, disappointed. "No, I don't want to delay that long. I'm calling from a phone booth near the East River Drive."

"What's happened?" I asked.

Speaking fast, he said, "A little while ago I had a call from Curtis Ebson. He said he has information that can get us out from under the plagiarism suit—some new dope on this fellow Rosencuist. A man who knows Rosencuist is at his house now. He wouldn't go into details on the phone, but he wants me to join them in West Harbor and hear the story for myself. I began to think I ought to have a witness present. I don't trust Ebson. I tried to reach Jim Forrest but his phone didn't answer, and I can't bring myself to ask Fritz Henning. I started out, and then decided to call you. But never mind, Sue—it isn't essential, and I must get going."

"Mr. C.," I urged, before he could hang up, "why don't you go ahead and I'll throw some clothes on and drive up in my own car? I could be there about half an hour after you, with luck—and a witness could be important."

After a second he said, "That makes sense."

"How do I get to his house?"

"Connecticut Turnpike — Exit 29A—drive four miles until you see a white church on your left. Turn right and climb a hill. His house is at the top."

"Got it," I said. "See you there."

The thought came to me that a secretary who rushes out for a long drive with wet hair at a word from her boss might be regarded as overmaternal or something; but I toweled my hair, pulled it under a black Russian-style wool toque, got into a black skirt and yellow sweater, made a pass at my face, and raced down to the street.

I was relieved to see that there was no police ticket on Anticop, as I call my second-hand old sports car, and which as usual was in a No Parking zone. Off I went, heading north; and once on the Turnpike, moving along at sixty, I felt exhilarated by the clear moonlit night and by a sense of adventure.

About an hour and a half from my apartment I turned off the West Harbor road and climbed a long gravel driveway to Ebson's house, where lights were on. Suddenly I braked to a stop. Mr. C.'s big Cadillac was blocking the drive, and he was standing alongside it.

"Sue!" He came toward "Listen." His voice was tight and unnatural, as if he were speaking through his teeth. "Turn around. Drive back home. Forget you've been here. Don't say a word to anybody. Hurry!"

I just stared. He was breathing hard, and in the moonlight I could see the terrible tension in his face—his eyes wide, his lips drawn back, his forehead knotted. Even before he told me, I knew that Ebson was dead.

"Did you kill him?" The question came out by itself.

"No! I found him dead. Murdered! My God, Sue, it's a terrible sight. I've got to notify the police, but I want to get you out of the way first."

I said, "I can't leave you like this."

"Don't be a fool, Sue! They'll think I did it, but that can't be helped. Go now—hurry!"

Taking a deep breath, I blurted, "Do you have to report it? Can't you just go too, and let someone else find the body?"

"Don't think I haven't thought of it," he said harshly. "But civic responsibility aside, the police would soon figure out I had been here. I was in the house— I must have touched things. Fingerprints—Ebson's telephone call to me—someone may have seen my car come up here—they'd get to me sooner or later and then my failure to report the murder would tell against me. I've got to face it."

"Then I'll face it with you," I said. "I can testify to your side of the story."

"No—you mustn't be involved. They'd think you were in it with me."

Deep down I could tell that he wanted me to stay, that he needed my help, and I was glad. "Let's not argue," I said. "I think you ought to telephone the police from the house right away, as if we had just arrived. We'll drive the cars—"

"No!" He shook his head irritably. "Once you start tampering with the truth in a case like this, you open up a bottomless pit. The best thing is to tell them exactly what happened and hope for the best."

"Then come on." I started walking toward the house. The front door was open and from outside I could see into a large hall, done in a rather elegant Colonial style.

"The door was like that when I got here," he said. "When no one answered my call I walked in—and found him. In the living room. Don't go in there, Sue."

"I can stand it if you can," I told him.

But a minute later, when in spite of his objections I went into the living room, I changed my mind. My knees quivered as I saw Ebson's body, and it was all I could do to keep from fainting as I slumped onto a couch.

Funny, what a shock will do to you. I had never seen death in its full horror before, and the hatred I thought I felt for Ebson dissolved in sick pity. A single vast purple bruise with huge holes in it—that's the only way I can describe his face, and I'll never get it out of my memory.

With my eyes blurred and my head between my knees, I was vaguely aware of Mr. C. at the telephone, speaking more like his usual controlled self. When he had finished he came over and gripped my shoulder. "Are you all right, Sue? They'll be here soon."

Five minutes later the room filled with uniforms, loud voices, and flash bulbs. I still felt unsteady and fuzzy-minded. When I heard a State Trooper with chevrons on his arm say to Mr. C., "I'm Sergeant Collins. Just how did you happen to find the body"—I didn't even bother to lift my head.

A curious sense of unreality came over me. I remember dreamily noticing that the black boots of the State Troopers were all highly polished, and thinking it was hard on their wives, doing all that polishing. Then someone said, "Don't step on those shells." I wondered what sea shells were doing on the carpet and looked to see. That was a mistake, because what I saw was Ebson's face, and a wave of nausea hit me.

I got up and said, "Excuse me," and groped my way into the hall. A polite trooper took my arm to steady me, pointed me toward a bathroom, and waited outside, like an anxious brother. Through the door, while I was bathing my face with cold water, I heard someone say to him, "Not a sign of that butler."

When I came back, feeling weak but under better control, Mr. C. was saying to the sergeant, ". . . so that's why some little time elapsed before I called you."

"Thanks," said the sergeant, putting his notebook away. "Just sit over there, if you don't mind. Don't try to speak to the young lady. Lieutenant Stauffer will be along soon, and he'll want to talk to you. What do you say, Doc?"

His question was for a man with a small black bag, who was kneeling by Ebson's body, and had peeled back its clothes. "Somebody didn't like him," the doctor said, and a policeman laughed—a local man, I think; he didn't wear boots. "Here's his wallet—want to check it?"

After a moment Sergeant Collins said. "Seven hundred in cash. Doesn't look like robbery was the motive."

"I suppose it's Ebson?" said the doctor. He was a plump, red-faced, cheerful little man.

"It's him," said the sergeant. "I've passed him on the road quite a few times."

The doctor said, "I never met him. My wife once phoned to ask him to a cocktail party, but he turned her down flat. Not a sociable type."

"That's what they say." I noticed the sergeant's expression as he glanced down at the body—a sort of veiled contempt. "All that fame and money didn't do him much good. He lived up here alone, except for a butler, or houseman, or whatever you call him. Some kind of foreigner. I've seen him shopping in the village. You noticed him—looked a little like Adolf Hitler. He isn't around, by the way."

The doctor looked at his watch and said, "Where the hell is Stauffer?"

"Attending a Civil Defense meeting in Hartford. He ought to be here soon."

"Well, I'm not going to wait for him any longer. My wife and I were entertaining guests when I got this call. Tell Stauffer to phone me and I'll give him my oral report."

The sergeant said, "Better let me have it, Doc. But keep it simple, will you? You can put the multiple contusions and ossicular dislocations and all that technical stuff in your written report."

"You want it simple?" said the doctor. "Okay. Somebody beat the man's face to a pulp and then shot him. Simple enough?"

The sergeant grinned and flipped open his notebook. "Come on, a little more detail than that, Doc, if you don't mind."

"Detail. Yes. I would say the beating was savage, prolonged, and sadistic. Apparently confined to the face. No bruises visible on the chest or abdomen, but of course we'll know more after the autopsy. Indications are that his nose was broken, the eyes badly bruised, and teeth were knocked out, all before he was shot. Exact extent of the damage is hard to estimate, owing to the bullet holes. He was shot six times in the face. The bullets shattered the cranium at the points of exit. Heavy caliber, to judge from the size of the holes. A .45 probably."

"Right," said the sergeant, picking up a brass cartridge shell and putting it down again.

"I'm always right." The doctor closed his bag. "Bullet holes in the carpet and cranial fragments under the head show that the man was supine, in his present position, when the shots were fired. Blood traces around what used to be the nose and mouth indicate that the four bullets through the center of the face were fired before the two bullets through the forehead, which were the fatal ones. Time of death—from forty-five minutes to an hour and a half ago. I couldn't put it any closer without guessing, and you wouldn't want me to guess, would you, Sergeant?"

"Not me," said the sergeant. "You can guess for the Lieutenant. One thing, though—about the beating. Fists, or a blunt instrument?"

"A fist *is* a blunt instrument," chuckled the doctor, "and that's almost certainly what did it. I would say he was beaten by a strong man in a maniacal rage." I saw him glance at Mr. C., who was sitting quietly in a chair, with a trooper behind him. "Looks as if whoever did it couldn't stop once he got started—just wanted to wipe Ebson off the face of the earth. Well, that's it. Tell Stauffer to phone me."

As he went out, the sergeant said mildly to Mr. C., "Mind emptying your pockets? Just a formality." The search took only a minute or two, but it included every possible place of concealment in Mr. C.'s clothing and the chair he had been sitting in. "Thanks," said the sergeant and turned to me.

"Be my guest," I said, standing up. I handed him my bag, pointed to the couch, and held out my arms.

After he had looked into the bag and felt the couch cushions, he grinned. "Whatever you've got underneath, it isn't a gun. But would you mind taking off your hat?"

"I certainly would mind!" I said. "I was washing my hair just before I came here—"

"Then with your permission," he said, and without waiting for it he felt my head through the toque, while I stood there like a store dummy and the other troopers grinned. But he wiped the grin off their faces when he said, "The Lieutenant will want the works. Fingerprints to start. Let's get 'em."

A trooper took fingerprints from the corpse, then Mr. C.'s, then mine, while another man went around the room spraying fine powder on furniture and doorknobs, and taking flashlight pictures of the results. When a car came up the driveway—they had moved my Anticop and Mr. C.'s Cadillac out of the way—they all turned expectantly.

My first impression of the man who walked into the room was one of height and a tanned, thirtyish face—a familiar face. It wasn't until several days later, when I happened to glance at a ten dollar bill, that I realized who he reminded me of—Alexander Hamilton, in herringbone tweed. When I first saw Lieutenant Stauffer, though, I wasn't in the mood to appreciate the male animal. To me he was an enemy.

"Just found your message, Collins," he said to the sergeant in an educated baritone. "What have you got?"

They moved away into a huddle for about ten minutes, the sergeant doing most of the talking in a low voice, and referring to his notebook, while the Lieutenant kept glancing around—at the corpse, at the room, at Mr. C., at me. His expression suggested amiable curiosity, nothing more. After a while he nodded, knelt by Ebson's body, studied it, and examined the carpet and the cartridge shells.

"Any neighbors call in to report the shots?" he called out.

They weren't bothering to whisper now. "Not so far as I know," the sergeant said. "An isolated house like this, they wouldn't sound very loud down below. Could be taken for a truck backfiring. Want these people out of the room?"

"No, let 'em stay. No harm. What we've got to do is try to find the gun," said Stauffer.

Collins looked gloomy. "Could be anywhere. The killer had plenty of time to ditch it."

"Maybe, maybe not. Let's not pass up any chances. It could be in the house, but search outside first. Cover the entire hill. Now. Before the newspaper boys clutter up the place."

Collins went out, and a few seconds later, through the window, I saw searchlights begin to sweep the grounds. Only one trooper, with an open notebook in his hand, remained with Stauffer, who said, "Mr. Cherington, would you sit on the couch next to Miss Tyson, where I can talk to both of you at the same time? Thank you." He pulled up a chair opposite us. There was an air of quiet assurance about him that made me feel it would be dangerous to challenge him.

So naturally I challenged him. I said, "Lieutenant, we're innocent bystanders. Will we have to stay much longer?"

He gave me a blue-eyed look that was pure ice, and said, "That depends. You both knew Mr. Ebson? I'd like a preliminary identification." He bent down to arrange the disheveled clothing of the corpse. "Please look at him again, Mr. Cherington, and tell me if you recognize him."

"It's Ebson," said Mr. Cherington wearily.

"How do you know?"

"Hair. Eyes. Build."

"You, Miss Tyson? I don't like to ask you to look at what's left of his face, but—"

I was a lot steadier by then. "What Mr. Cherington said, and I can also tell by his hands. Those brown freckles and the short nails. I've noticed them before."

"All right, that will do to go on with. In a case of serious disfigurement, we've got to be careful. Formal identification will come later. Speaking of hands—may I see yours, Mr. Cherington?"

Looking startled, Mr. C. held out his hands, palms upward. The Lieutenant turned them over and studied them for a while. "Not the contusions I would expect if you gave him that beating with your bare fists. Still, I notice the knuckles of your right hand are bruised. How come?"

Mr. C.'s face changed. His voice, though, was steady as he said, "I had an argument with Ebson at my office this afternoon, and I hit him. Once. Well, twice."

"Hit him where?"

"In the stomach and on the point of the jaw."

Again the Lieutenant knelt by the body. "Yes," he said, "there's a bruise, more or less isolated, under the chin." He returned to his chair. "All right. Why did you hit him?"

I said, "Mr. C., don't you think you ought to call Mr. Forrest?"

Instantly the Lieutenant said, "Is that your attorney? Do you feel you need one, Mr. Cherington?"

"I've got nothing to hide," said Mr. C. "The facts can't be concealed anyway." Trying not to show his feelings, he told the Lieutenant the story of the plagiarism and his reasons for going to Ebson's house.

Stauffer said, "That's very clear.

Thank you. Miss Tyson, you don't disagree with any of that, of course."

"There's no of course about it," I snapped at him, "because it's all true."

"Is it? How do you know that Ebson telephoned Mr. Cherington to come here tonight?"

"Why," I began, and then, as he smiled, I stumbled on. "Mr. Cherington's word is enough."

He nodded pleasantly. "We're just looking for facts. One fact—did you wear gloves tonight, Mr. Cherington?"

I saw what he was getting at and held my breath. Mr. C. said, "No."

"Don't you usually wear gloves when you drive?"

"In cold weather, but not on a mild night like this. I didn't even wear a topcoat."

Stauffer said to the trooper, "Ask Collins to look for a pair of gloves as well as for the gun." As the man went out, the Lieutenant turned back to us. "Please don't try to leave. You may talk or smoke if you wish. We'll put something over the body so you won't have to look at it."

I said, "Is it customary for the police to let their suspects watch them work?"

He gave me another of those withering looks. "I find it helps break them down, Miss Tyson. They see how hopeless it is to lie."

He returned to the body, and although I avoided looking, I knew he was making a minute examination of every article of clothing on the corpse, and the contents of every pocket.

Sergeant Collins came in and said, "If there's anything out there, we'll find it. Want me to take the butler's room now?"

Stauffer nodded and the sergeant went toward the back of the house.

Mr. C. and I did not speak, but occasionally our eyes would meet. I found myself becoming bored and impatient. Once Stauffer went outside and left us alone for a few minutes. If he knew what he was doing, I certainly didn't. When he came back he talked on the telephone for a while, but all he did was report the bald facts to the person at the other end.

It was a relief when Sergeant Collins came in carrying some papers on a piece of cardboard. He said, "These were in the butler's room. Swiss passport and some letters. Dorf is his name, Peter Dorf. This letter is a notice of a meeting of the Swiss-American Society in New York. Tonight. That might account for his being out."

"Could be," said the Lieutenant. "The meeting would be long over. He ought to be back soon, if he was there. We'll know any minute. Check the passport for prints. Let's see the picture first, though. Yes, I've seen him around."

A few seconds later the excitement began. A trooper came in and said, "Lieutenant, we got something. Down the hill. An old well, boarded up, but with a loose plank—pulled up recently, to judge by the nails. We put a light down. Mud at the bottom, but in the mud some lumps, and one lump has fingers sticking out—glove fingers, is my guess."

"Show me," said the Lieutenant, and he and Collins went out with the man. It seemed a long time before they came back. Again Collins was carrying a piece of cardboard—this time with a big mud-covered pistol on it, and two heavy gloves, which I guessed were pigskin under the mud.

Stauffer said, "Mr. Cherington, we've just found this Colt .45 automatic. Ever seen it before?"

It gave me a shock to see that Mr. C. had turned pale. "I don't think so," he said.

"You're not sure?"

"I can't be sure. I saw a lot of guns like that during the war."

"You were in the war? You carried one of these?"

"Yes. I'm not trying to conceal anything. When I came out of the army I was allowed to keep my gun. I've got a permit."

"A New York permit? Where is your gun now?"

"In a desk in my apartment. I haven't seen it for a long time."

"Okay. We'll check the registration. The gloves, now. Ever own a pair like this?"

"I may have. I've owned lots of gloves. Lieutenant, I think Miss Tyson is right. I can't understand what's happening here, and I'd like to phone my attorney."

"You'll have an opportunity to do that. But you haven't been accused of anything—yet. I'm holding you and Miss Tyson as material witnesses."

"What kind of material do you want from us?" I couldn't resist saying. "Synthetics? Because you don't seem to recognize all-wool when you see it."

He snubbed me with a look. "You'll be taken to a hotel in West Harbor and you'll have good accommodations overnight. Call your attorney from there if you wish, Mr. Cherington. We'll talk again in the morning." His face was still calm and pleasant, but I could detect a glint of triumph in his eye, as he added, "There will be a guard at the hotel. Don't try to leave. Good night."

We were getting into a police car when a weather-beaten jalopy drove up the hill. The man who got out stood dazed, his eyeglasses reflecting the beam of a searchlight that was turned on him, and in a high, thin, frightened voice he said, "Who are you? What iss?"

"You Dorf?" said the sergeant.

"Yess. You are police?"

Collins was right. The silly little mustache and the dark lock of hair over the forehead made Dorf look like a caricature of Hitler. It struck me that anyone who employed a houseman with a face like that would have to be an exhibitionist who enjoyed shocking his guests—like Ebson.

A policeman took Dorf by the arm and led him into the house. Just before our car started, I heard him cry, "*Gott in Himmel!*"

Late the next morning, after hours in which I sat in the police station reading old newspapers, I was taken into Stauffer's stark little office. I expected to find Mr. C. there—he had left the hotel before me—but the Lieutenant was alone.

He said, "Please sit down. I'll come right to the point. A little while ago we arrested Cherington for the murder of Curtis Ebson."

I wasn't so much surprised as angry. I said, "I thought you had more sense than that."

He just grinned. "For your information, there was a moment when I thought we might hold you as an accessory."

"That wouldn't be any sillier than what you've done."

"We decided to believe your story. Like to know why? Not your face." I glared at him, but he didn't seem to notice. "The New York police checked you out for us. Last night a cruising police officer saw your car illegally parked at 9:15. When he went back a little later to give you a summons, your car was gone. That tells us approximately your time of departure. We know from the doorman at Cherington's apartment house that he drove off about half an hour earlier. Add the fact that your neighbor heard your phone ring around nine o'clock, and we have reasonable confirmation of your story."

The superior look on his face made me want to throw his desk calendar at him. "I'm sure you are wonderfully efficient, Lieutenant. The only trouble is, you've arrested an innocent man."

"I don't think you'll say that when you know the facts. Right now the District Attorney is giving the story to the newspapers. You'll be able to read it in a few hours, but I think you're entitled not to be kept in suspense."

"Well, thanks for something," I muttered.

"Facts, Miss Tyson." He held up a big hand and raised a finger. "Item One: the gun that we found is Cherington's, registered in New York.

"Item Two:"—Another long finger went up—"the gloves. They're stained with the same blood type as Ebson's, they fit Cherington, and he admits to having once owned such a pair.

"Item three: Cherington claims Ebson phoned him last night from his house. The phone company has no record of such a call . . . Want more?"

I was too stunned to answer, and after a second he went on, "I know it's tough for you to hear, but that's the way it is."

"No," I managed to say. "That's

only the way you think it is."

The sympathy went out of his voice. "Early this morning I had a call from a New York literary agent, Emmanuel Dryfoos. You know him?"

I nodded, and made an effort to sound normal. "False teeth and thick eyeglasses. Myopic Mannie, we call him in the trade. Ebson's agent."

"That's the one. He said he had just received a letter mailed by Ebson shortly before he was killed. At my request he came right up here with the letter. It said that Ebson and Cherington had quarreled, that Cherington had struck Ebson and threatened to kill him, and that Ebson thought he meant it and was planning to leave for Europe immediately."

"He was lying!" I said. "Mr. Cherington was angry, all right, but he would never—"

Stauffer cut in. "Neither you nor I have ever plumbed the depths of human nature, Miss Tyson. When a man is sufficiently desperate he can do anything. I don't say Cherington intended to kill Ebson or even to beat him up when he started out. The fact that he phoned you to come along suggests that his motive was merely to force a showdown. I'm assuming now that he brought the gun along in case Ebson got violent. But when Ebson laughed at him, and probably taunted him, Cherington's rage must have run away with him. Probably he was about to leave—he had put on his driving gloves—when something Ebson said triggered a compulsion to smash the man's face. And once Cherington started he couldn't stop. Some men react that way when they attack someone they hate. He had to go on and on, so long as Ebson was on his feet, or he kept pulling him back to his feet and hitting him some more. And by the time Ebson fell after that terrible beating, but still alive, Cherington was completely out of control. He had to kill him, and not only kill him, but obliterate him, so far as he could, with bullets."

"No," I said. "No."

"Yes, Miss Tyson. Face it. Temporary insanity, if you like. The District Attorney would accept such a plea, I believe. I'm telling you this now because if you have any influence with your boss, the best thing you can do for him is to urge him to make a full confession. Otherwise we'll go after a first degree murder conviction, and we'll get it."

I realized then why he was taking so much trouble with me. He wanted me to help close his case against Mr. C. I said, "You're wasting your time. I don't believe he did it."

"Oh, come on, Miss Tyson," he said. "What do you base that on—woman's intuition?"

"Don't sneer at my intuition,

Lieutenant, or I'll have a word or two to say about your logic."

"But the gun that fired the shots was his. The gloves were his. And he was there alone with Ebson. Means, motive, opportunity. What more do you want—photographs?"

I felt myself struggling like a fish in a net. "That houseman," I said. "Maybe Dorf—"

"Do you think we're total incompetents? We had the New York police check Dorf out. Yesterday evening he attended a meeting of the Swiss-American Society and was positively identified by four persons who saw him there. At 11:30 he took the last train to West Harbor out of Grand Central, was recognized by the conductor, arrived at 1:05, got in his car, and drove right up to the house. No doubt whatever about that. So forget about Dorf. Come on, Miss Tyson, if you're a friend of Cherington's, you should try to convince him—try to make him see that it's to his advantage to take a temporary insanity plea."

"Not if he didn't do it," I said.

There was disgust, or maybe pity, in the look he gave me. "You seem to be emotionally involved."

"Of course I am! He's my boss and my friend. What gets me is your attitude. You're just taking the obvious solution and stopping there. That's what the police always do."

He tried to laugh. "You've been reading the wrong detective stories."

"No. Your case is full of holes. Do you think if Mr. Cherington killed Ebson he would be so foolish as to hide his gun and gloves where you could find them?"

Stauffer said, "He had no choice. There he was, stuck with the murder weapon, and with you on the way. What else could he do with the gun? Get in his car and look for a river? You might have come while he was gone. Dig a hole? With what? And leave the fresh earth partly exposed? Fling the gun into a bush? Too risky. Conceal it in the house? We'd be bound to find it. No, it isn't so easy to hide a gun in a hurry. He had to take a chance, and an inconspicuous, muddy old well shaft some distance from the house didn't look too bad. If my men hadn't been on their toes, or if the gloves had sunk a little deeper in the mud, they might have missed them altogether."

I couldn't argue any more. "May I see him?"

"You still think he's innocent?"

"I'm not going to try to get him to confess, if that's what you mean."

His voice took on a rough edge. "Then there's no point in your seeing him now. He's with his attorney. Probably in two or three days—if he wants to see visitors. You can go home now. Don't try to change your place of residence or leave the city. You'll be seeing me again soon."

"That will be a real treat," I said, and went out of the room with my head up, but with my spirits sunk.

When I walked into my office two hours later, my phone was ringing. I lifted it mechanically, and listened to Henning's secretary, saying that he wanted to see me. I said, "Not now," and hung up. Instantly it rang again. This time it was Jim Forrest, his voice even more tense than usual.

"You know about Paul?"

"Yes. How is he?"

"About as you'd expect," said Forrest. "I just got back from West Harbor. He asked me to keep you posted. Here's the way things stand. I'm going to get him a top criminal lawyer. He needs somebody with more courtroom experience than I've got. I'll look after the plagiarism suit. I'm trying now to get hold of this fellow Rosencuist. His home on Martha's Vineyard doesn't answer, and people up there tell me he's spending the winter in Acapulco. I've placed a call for him."

"Shall I come to your office?" I said.

"No need of that. Stay put. Look after Paul's mail. Answer the telephone. Keep this fellow Henning out of my hair. He's called me twice. And don't give out any information about the plagiarism business or anything else. The papers are bound to be after you, and half of New York besides. If the police talk to you again, just tell the truth, but say as little as you can manage. Don't volunteer anything."

He knew what he was talking about. I must have had twenty calls in the next two hours. Some were from Mr. Cherington's friends, wanting to know what had happened; others from reporters wanting to interview me. I told the friends they knew as much as I did, and the reporters that they would be wasting their time, because I had nothing to say.

A few times the receptionist phoned to say someone wanted to see me on important business, but I guessed this was just an enterprising reporter's ploy, and I said no, I wasn't seeing anyone. Finally, I couldn't take any more, and I asked the switchboard operator not to put any more calls through for a while.

By then I had a hatchet-type headache that would put a TV painkiller commercial to shame. I took some aspirin, put a cold cloth over my eyes, and stretched out for a minute on the leather sofa in Mr. C.'s office. The next thing I knew Lucy Evans was shaking me and saying, "Sue, wake up. Have you seen this?"

The late afternoon papers were out, and she had one. She was terribly excited, and the flush in her cheeks and the sparkle in her dark eyes made her prettier than I had ever seen her. If she was enjoying herself, it was understandable. What was Mr. C. to her?

I sat up and looked at the pictures of Ebson and Mr. C. on the front page, but my head still ached so much I could hardly focus my eyes.

"How he must have hated him!" Lucy said.

"What?" I said dully. "Oh, you mean the boss. No, I don't believe he did it."

"How can you say that?" said Lucy.

"He isn't the sadistic type. I can imagine him beating a man, or possibly shooting him, but not messing him up like that."

She looked doubtful. "I don't think they go by types. He could be a murderer, you know. These quiet men who bottle everything up—I've heard of them going berserk when they get mad. Besides, I tried Nameology on him this morning, and do you know the first word I saw in Paul Cherington? Panther."

"Oh, Lucy, for heaven's sake," I said, and picked up the newspaper.

Lucy read over my shoulder. "Did they really have a fight here, Sue?" she asked, her eyes wider than ever.

"Yes."

She sighed. "I wish I worked for a publisher. In the movie business all the excitement is in the movies."

That was when the receptionist rang to say that Lieutenant Stauffer of the Connecticut State Police was outside and wanted to see me. So soon? I couldn't figure it out.

When Lucy left I tried to do something about my face and hair, but before I could even take the shine off my nose he was in the office. In a pleasant, businesslike manner he said, "I'd like to look at the room where Ebson and Cherington quarreled."

He didn't miss a thing on that tour. Back in my office, and seated, he looked at me as if deciding whether to boil me over a slow flame or roast me in a hot oven. Finally he decided on a pressure cooker.

"Miss Tyson," he said, "I'm going to ask you a direct question and I hope for a direct answer. Did you hear the conversation yesterday between Ebson and Mr. Cherington?"

I suddenly realized what he was after.

"How could I?" I stalled. "They were in there. I was in here. The door to Mr. Cherington's office was closed, and it's soundproof."

He sighed. "Cut it out," he said. "You heard it over your intercom system."

I said, "You're just guessing."

He said, "Am I? A little while ago we came across a diary that Ebson kept. He made an entry yesterday, after he got back from his visit to your boss. In it he describes the meeting, and says that he noticed the intercom system was open while he was in Cherington's office, and he believed you heard their conversation. Well?"

When I hesitated, he went on, "If you're called to the witness stand, you'll have to give testimony about this under oath. I don't think you're the type to commit perjury. You might as well save trouble and tell me now."

That did it. "All right," I said. "I heard them."

"Good. You made notes?"

I said, "Notes?"

He wasn't fooled. "I want your notebook, please. Don't make me search for it. It's true I'm out of my jurisdiction, but if I call the New York police they'll be glad to send up a detective with a search warrant."

In the end he got it and quickly found the pages he wanted. I said hopefully, "I'll read it to you, if you like."

The look in his eye was amused as he replied, "No, thanks. I can read your system—your notes are quite clear." A few minutes later he glanced up, deadpan. "Ebson and you saw something of each other, I gather."

It's one of my weaknesses that I blush easily. "What we saw was mutual dislike. From the beginning." For the life of me I couldn't remember how much of that conversation I had put down.

Stauffer had not struck me as a gallant type. Now he surprised me by saying, "If he knew the intercom was open, he may have been trying to needle you."

"Well, thank you!" I said.

A moment later his face lighted up. "Here we are. 'I ought to kill you. Maybe I will.' That's Cherington, of course."

"It wasn't a threat," I said. "He was just angry. Who wouldn't have been?"

Stauffer shrugged. "I'll take this with me, and give you a receipt. I think that covers everything right now. Thanks very much. Remember, we want you to stay within easy reach."

He stood up, smiled, and said goodbye. I didn't smile.

After he left, I didn't know what to do with myself. For want of anything better, I picked up the manuscript that Henning had left, *The Quest for Identity*, and browsed through it. It was all about the lengths to which insecure people will go to strengthen their sense of belonging. Some of the case histories mentioned well-known historical figures and criminals. I really couldn't have cared less.

By then it was nearly six o'clock. I went home to my little Greenwich Village apartment, cooked some dinner for myself, and watched TV. The Ebson case was on every news program, and on one there was a picture of the boss.

It was a bad night for me, and the morning wasn't any better. Even the weather was at its worst—cold, rainy, sniffly, especially for a girl who had gone a-driving with wet hair. The papers said that Mr. C. had been arraigned and charged with murder, and had pleaded Not Guilty. The more I thought about it, the less hope I had. But I wanted to see him, Stauffer or no Stauffer.

I drove up to West Harbor, and after a long damp wait at the jail, they showed me into the Visitors' Room. There he was, pale and drawn, on the other side of a wire screen. Some letters that I had brought for him were taken by a guard, and I gave Mr. C. a brief rundown on events at the office, such as they were.

He hardly said a word until I stood up to go. Then he asked, "Sue, do you believe I did it?"

"No!" I said. My voice rang out louder than I had meant it to.

He looked at me in surprise. "I'm glad. Even Forrest thinks I'm guilty. He's been urging me to plead temporary insanity. He says I could get off with a reasonably light sentence."

"Don't you do it!" I flared.

He tried to smile at me as he turned away. When I got back to the city that evening I had a cold, probably psychosomatic, I recognized, but that was no help. The nose still got red, the eyes still ran, and after I took my temperature and found it was 101, I went to bed.

Thirty-six miserable hours later, Forrest telephoned, and said in a mean voice, "Your office told me I'd find you at home. I've got a bone to pick with you. Don't you think you should have shown me your notes of the talk between Paul and Ebson before you gave it to the police?"

He had me there. I don't know how I could have forgotten to mention the notes to him, unless it was just my negative feeling about him.

I began to say, "I'm sorry." It came out, "I'b soddy."

He evidently didn't think the change in my voice worth a comment. He said "Do you consider yourself loyal, giving your notebook to them?"

I felt my temper rising close to my temperature. "I never had a chance to hold it back," I said. "Probably I should have mentioned it to you, but it doesn't really change anything, does it?"

"Oh, no," he said, all sarcasm. "It may just help to convict Paul of murder in the first degree, that's all."

That got under my guard. "You don't have to twist the knife."

He relented a little. "Well, it's too late now. That's not why I'm calling, anyhow. For your information, I've located Rosencuist in Acapulco, at the Hotel Torero. I've just talked to him. He absolutely refuses to see me or discuss the matter. It's entirely up to his lawyer, he says. More or less what I expected."

"Have you spoken to Mr. Eager again?" I said.

"Yes, but he's got us in a bind, and he knows it. He sticks to $800,000. The only weapon I have is the threat of bankruptcy. Henning says he will put up $300,000 for all of Cherington's stock in the firm, not a penny more, provided that the money goes to Rosencuist and that Paul personally pays the rest of the company's obligation. Paul's other assets come to less than $250,000. I've offered Eager $500,000 as our maximum figure. He's asking for time to consider."

"But that would strip the boss of everything he has!" I said.

"I'm afraid he won't be needing much money for a long time to come," said Forrest, and hung up.

With all that adrenalin charging through my veins, I couldn't bear to stay cooped up in the apartment any longer. I did what I could with my face, blew myself to a taxi, and went to the office. On the way I opened a morning paper, and the first thing that struck my eye was a small picture of Adolf Hitler on the front page, except that it was Ebson's houseman, Peter Dorf.

The caption read, *Witness in Ebson Murder Case Flies to Switzerland.* The paragraph that followed said that the Connecticut police had permitted Dorf to go to New York to look for another job, but that he had eluded surveillance and boarded the first plane for Geneva. "The police," said the story, "have verified his arrival in Switzerland and have been in touch with the Swiss authorities with a view to assuring Dorf's return to this country if his testimony should be required . . ."

I could hardly wait to get to the office and telephone Stauffer. If he had a wound, I wanted to be the first to rub salt in it. But he wasn't in, and I had to be content with leaving a message, asking him to call me.

My cold proved that it had some value, if only in establishing me as a plague spot; for Henning came charging in to see me, stopped short at the sight of my Kleenex box and the sound of my voice, and backed out with a mumbled, "I'll talk to you later."

The only person who was willing to stay in the same room with me was Lucy Evans. She came down at lunchtime with sandwiches and coffee, and I was so grateful that I tried to answer all her questions. Mostly she wanted to know about the plagiarism suit, which had been mentioned in the newspapers. I told her everything that wasn't confidential to the firm and Mr. C., but when she took out her pencil and picked up a pad, I said, "Oh, no! Not Nameology again!"

"It might help," she said solemnly. "What's that man's name?" She wrote out *Daniel B. Rosencuist.* After a minute, her face lighted up, and she scrawled something. "Sue!" she said excitedly. "See what's in his name!" She handed me the pad. Under the name she had written *ist ein scoundrel.* "Those letters came right out at me!" she cried. "It's almost as if a spirit was helping!"

"It must be a German spirit," I said. "Or a comedian's."

"Oh, you can scoff!" she said. "And another thing! He's got 'cobra' in his name, which even Ebson didn't have. You look out for Rosencuist."

She went away, leaving me staring at the pad. Finally I picked it up and wrote under Rosencuist's every other name I could think of in connection with the case—Curtis D. Ebson, Peter Dorf, Paul Cherington, Fritz Henning, James Forrest, Ernst C. Dubois, James L. Eager, Scot Burnside. I must have sat there for an hour thinking. When I got up I went back to that manuscript, *The Quest for Identity*, and read parts of it again. I kept asking myself: was I on the track of something, or was I crazy? My mind was whirling so fast that when the phone rang, and I heard Stauffer speak, it took me a moment to remember what I had wanted to say to him.

He said, "What's the matter with your voice? Got a cold?"

"That's what I call real detection," I said. "Pity you didn't use some of that talent on Dorf."

"Cut it," he said disgustedly. "All right, so the fellow ducked out. No criminal implication in that."

"Then what was his reason?"

"I've had a letter from him. It will be in tonight's papers. Here, I'll read it to you. He says, 'I do not wish to be connected with such a case. It would be bad for my reputation. In my work as butler, a good reputation is everything. Now I go back to Switzerland, where there is not so much crime and shooting. Yours truly, Peter Dorf.' He was just looking out for Number One, that's all. Can't say I blame him."

"How could you let him get away like that?"

"Do you think we have a right to prevent a man from earning a living just because he's a foreigner and looks like a comic strip character? The New York police were supposed to keep an eye on him."

"Suppose he doesn't come back for the trial?"

Stauffer growled, "We can get along without him if necessary. This case is open and shut."

"Who shut it?"

That touched a nerve. "Miss Tyson, why don't you let it alone? You're wasting your time and mine."

Any notion I'd had of confiding in him vanished. All I wanted to do was crush him. "If you knew what I know, you'd come crawling to apologize," I snapped, and hung up.

My cold had begun to ease off, and my head felt pounds lighter. In a dim way, it seemed to me that I understood the murder of Curtis Ebson, and it was suddenly clear to me what had to be done. I went to the elevators, rode up to Lucy's office, and told her I would like to borrow something, and no questions asked. "Just some Orbit stationery."

"Are you kidding?" she said.

"No questions," I reminded her, and she gave me the stationery.

I said, "If you get a letter or telegram from Rosencuist, will you let me know?"

She thought I was out of my

mind, and said so. Back in my office, I typed a letter on one of the sheets she had given me, and addressed it to Mr. Daniel B. Rosencuist, Hotel Torero, Acapulco. It said:

Dear Mr. Rosencuist:

For some time we have been negotiating with Cherington & Co. for the motion picture rights of the novel *The Gauze Enchantment*, by the late Curtis Ebson. We have now learned that you have brought a plagiarism suit against Cherington's and Ebson, and that it is a foregone conclusion that all rights in the book, including motion picture rights, will be conveyed to you by the courts. We are frank to admit that we are more anxious than ever to make a film based on this great book, which is bound to be one of the best-sellers of all time. We recognize that we must be prepared to pay in excess of our last offer to Cherington, which was $320,000, and we would like to get the matter settled as soon as possible.

I expect shortly to go to Hollywood for a meeting with the heads of our studio. If you are interested in talking with us, will you meet me there? Subject to your convenience I would suggest 3 P.M. on the 24th day of this month as a good time. If this suits you, or if another time would be preferable for you, will you please wire me here as soon as possible? I shall look forward to your reply.

Sincerely yours,
Lou C. Evans

The letter went off airmail, special delivery, and the next three days I felt like a weak suspension bridge in a high wind. I went through the office routine, and had a bad session with Henning, in which he said that from present indications Mr. Cherington would not be back in the office for a long time, and that he felt it was only fair to give me as much opportunity as possible to find another job. I managed to confine my reply to "Thank you, Mr. Henning." But when he added, "Of course, under certain conditions I might be able to keep you on my personal staff," I turned on him and said, "You sound like Curtis Ebson, and you know what happened to him." His mouth was open but silent when I walked out.

Finally Lucy telephoned. She said, "Very funny, ha, ha. What's the idea?"

I said, "Hold everything. I'll be right up."

She had received a telegram from Rosencuist, addressed to Lou C. Evans, Executive Office, Orbit Films, and she said, "What are you trying to do, get me fired? If my boss saw this, he'd think I was up to some funny business."

"Give me the telegram," I said. "I'll tell you all about it later."

"Be sure you do," she ordered. "You can't keep me waiting for the other shoe to drop."

The telegram was from Acapulco, and it read: WILL MEET YOU PLACE

AND TIME PROPOSED. ROSENCUIST.

That was all I needed to know. I rushed back to my office and called Stauffer. As usual, he wasn't in, and as usual I left urgent word for him to call. After a long hour he did.

I said to him, "You won't want to believe this, but I have evidence that Mr. Cherington did not kill Ebson."

Something like a grunt came out of him. "Miss Tyson, do you know what you're saying?"

"I do."

"Then why don't you give your evidence to Cherington's lawyer?"

I said, "This is too important for lawyers to fool with."

"Look here," he said, "we can't talk about it on the phone. I'm busy as hell today, but I'm willing to drive to New York this evening. Just let me warn you that if this is some girlish brainstorm you'll wish you had never met me."

"Brainstorm!" I said. "Do you think I'm trying to get a date with you, Lieutenant? I'm not that hard up for dates, thank you. You've got a mind like a—a dumb cop. I'm doing you a favor. If you don't want to come, don't—and see what happens to your case at the trial!"

He said, "Meet me at Malloy's Sea Food House on Second Avenue at seven. If you really have got something, I'll buy you dinner."

"Geez, thanks," I said.

When we met that night at Malloy's, he was wearing a dark suit and a cautious tie, and looked like any young Madison Avenue executive, except for his face, which I thought could be trusted. We ordered whiskey sours to keep the waiter happy, and I began talking. It took me twenty minutes, and he didn't interrupt me once. When I was through, he looked at me for a while, without saying a word. Then he signaled the waiter, and ordered lobster Thermidor and champagne.

I said, "On a policeman's salary?"

"You deserve it," he said. I judge a lot by a man's eyes. The blue of his was clear, and I noticed they lifted at the corners when he smiled.

When we left Malloy's we went to his car, which was parked in a No Parking zone. These cops! I was beginning to feel the champagne. When he drove me home and opened the front door of the apartment house and suggested that he see me to my walk-up apartment, I wasn't sure he could be trusted after all; so I said no, thanks, don't bother, I would be all right. He didn't insist. A really irritating type. He just said, "You'd better make your own plane reservation, and we'll reimburse you."

Two days later, early on the 23rd, I jetted out to Los Angeles. A detective sergeant named Magruder was waiting for me when I got off the plane—a serious-looking man on the close-mouthed side. All he said was that the Orbit Film people had agreed to cooperate.

That's how it happened he and I

were in a fancy executive office in the Orbit Building at three P.M. on the 24th, when the receptionist telephoned and said, "Mr. Evans? Mr. Rosencuist is here to see you."

Magruder said, "Have a page show him in."

I was wearing dark glasses and a bright print dress, and had a big floppy hat on, very Hollywood, and I had my back to the door and was looking out of a window when the page said, "Mr. Rosencuist, Mr. Evans."

Magruder-Evans said, "How do you do, Mr. Rosencuist? Have a chair."

I gave them five seconds to sit down, then I turned around. The sight of Rosencuist startled me for a second. He was a gray-haired man with a loose-lipped face, heavy features, and a short gray beard. But I took off my glasses and said, "Hello, Mr. Ebson."

He sprang up, but Magruder was ready for him, grabbed his arms, and said, "Police." There wasn't any struggle. A few minutes later Magruder had peeled off the gray wig and there was Ebson's crew cut. But his nose looked thicker, and he seemed to have something in his cheeks that puffed them out. The look in the eyes when he turned toward me was something I'd be glad to forget . . .

There was nothing else to keep me in California. Magruder said they would hold on to Ebson until the extradition papers came through and I flew back East the same day. When my plane landed at Idlewild it was very late, but I thought I should telephone the Lieutenant without delay. A sleepy woman answered, and when he finally came on the wire, I said, "Sorry if I disturbed Mrs. Stauffer."

"Who?" he said. "There is no Mrs. Stauffer. That was my sister. She's visiting me."

"A likely story," I said. "Anyway, I thought you ought to know. We got him."

"Did you wake me up to tell me that?" he complained. "I had a teletype from Magruder five hours ago." Why that hadn't occurred to me I shall never know. He said, "Forget it. Go to bed."

I called him an ungrateful eleven-letter word, but he had already disconnected.

The next morning I overslept, and didn't get to the office until after ten. When I walked in, there in the boss's room were Mr. C., Jim Forrest, Mr. Eager, and Lieutenant Stauffer.

I had my moment of glory. The boss broke off something he was saying and took me by both hands. "Stauffer tells me you were wholly responsible for getting me free. I don't understand it, but I take his word for it."

Jim Forrest interrupted. "I look at you with new eyes, lady."

"Contact lenses?" I said to myself. I still didn't like him, and I'm still willing to bet it was one of his wives that Ebson posed for.

Mr. C. said, "Lieutenant Stauffer kindly agreed to come here this morning, Sue, to clear up some points that have been puzzling us. I was just saying that I still can't understand Ebson's motive. Why go to such lengths? His next book could have made him another fortune."

Stauffer shook his head. "There's no trace of any manuscript under way in his house, and his agent says Ebson never showed him any part of the book he was supposed to be working on. My guess is that it was a myth. There's no such novel."

"That's the picture I get," Forrest put in. "A burned-out totally cynical writer. He had nothing more to hope for from his writing. His earnings from *Gauze* had been big, but after taxes they were still not enough to give him the kind of life he wanted. But if he could arrange for Ebson to be dead, and for Rosencuist to be alive—think what he stood to make! Aside from assets that he might have already stashed away in some other country, he would have huge damages from Cherington's, and from you personally, Paul. Also future royalties from *Gauze*—and the murder publicity would mean even larger sales. A big motion picture deal for *Gauze*. Add it all up, and it might total more than two million dollars! And all he had to do for it was to establish an identity as Rosencuist by renting a house on Martha's Vineyard, and then provide Ebson's corpse for the police. He must have planned it for years."

"It's still hard for me to believe," said Mr. C., "that he made up that story of how he came to plagiarize *Babes in Joyland*. He convinced me."

"Me, too. It was his best piece of fiction," I put in.

"Not all fiction," Stauffer said. "One thing he said was true. The entire edition of *Babes* had been destroyed by the publisher, Dubois—all except the one copy Rosencuist, or Ebson, held out. He knew that beyond a doubt—because Rosencuist and Dubois were one."

"I'll be damned," said Forrest.

"His real name is Rosencuist," Stauffer resumed, "but we know now that he founded The Libido Press as Dubois. That way, if Dubois got into trouble with the government for sending obscene literature through the mail he could disappear, and Rosencuist would be in the clear."

At this point little Mr. Eager, who so far hadn't said a word, spoke up. "Gentlemen," he said, "and Miss Tyson, I asked permission to attend this conference because I wanted to make it clear that I was acting in good faith. The man came to me as Rosencuist, gray beard and all, with a *bona fide* address in Massachusetts. There was no doubt that his book, *Babes in Joyland*, had been plagiarized. Moreover, he gave me the address of the supposed Ernst Dubois in Mexico City.

"Before communicating with you, Mr. Cherington, I took the precaution of writing to Dubois, sending him a photostat of the contract, and asking him to validate his signature. A letter came back promptly saying that the contract was genuine and that he was willing to testify to that effect. Evidently Rosencuist went to Mexico City in order to answer my letter as Dubois. But I could not begin to suspect such a thing."

"It's all falling into place," said Mr. C. "No doubt he had me picked for his patsy from the first—for the plagiarism suit and for the murder. He's been a guest in my house more than once since *Gauze* was published. I suppose it was one of those times that he took my gun and gloves. I still can't quite make out, though, why there had to be a murder at all. Why couldn't Ebson just have disappeared—let it be known that he had gone, say, to the South Seas? Wouldn't that have served as well?"

Stauffer shook his head. "No, sir. On the contrary. If he had disappeared, that would have focused attention on the lawsuit. Everyone would have suspected possible collusion between Ebson and Rosencuist. He had to avoid that at all costs. For his scheme to work, Rosencuist had to be just a distant figure in a lawsuit, Ebson had to be regarded as dead, and someone had to be tagged with the murder so as to close the investigation."

"I will never cease to be amazed," said Mr. Eager, "at what some men will do even for two million dollars."

The Lieutenant looked at him with a wry expression. "Sometimes I've been amazed what a man will do for two bucks. If you would like to know what Ebson did, here's our reconstruction. His first step was to hire a houseman who would provide a suitable corpse. The man had to be of age, height, and build similar to Ebson's, to have dark brown eyes and black hair with a touch of gray. The employment agency where Dorf was hired tells us that Ebson offered very high wages but was extremely difficult to please. In that one agency alone he saw more than thirty applicants before he chose Dorf. That was only a few days after Dorf arrived from Switzerland. Nothing could have suited Ebson better. He wanted a man whose fingerprints weren't on file and who didn't have an American dentist who could identify the corpse from its teeth. He himself had been careful to avoid fingerprinting and he used no dentist in these parts. Best of all, Dorf was an oddball who wore a forelock over one eye and an Adolf Hitler mustache."

"I suppose," said Forrest, "that anyone who looked at Dorf was so aware of his resemblance to Hitler that his general resemblance to Ebson passed unnoticed."

Stauffer nodded and went on, "Ebson was thorough. The nose was a problem—his was thin, Dorf's was thick—but he had a way around that. He touched up his hair to make the color and gray of the temples conform to Dorf's. And when he saw that Dorf had brown freckles on his hands he painted similar freckles on his own—just in case someone noticed the hands of the corpse, as you did, Miss Tyson. Now he was ready for action. The killing had to be done as quickly as possible after you heard of the plagiarism suit, Mr. Cherington—while your anger was at its peak."

Mr. C. said, "I suppose that's why he needled me into hitting him. An atmosphere of hate would explain the mauling of the face."

"Exactly. At his house everything was ready—his disguise as Dorf, including some stuff, probably a camphor preparation, to inject into his nose and give it the bulbous look of Dorf's. He wouldn't kill Dorf until the last possible moment, so that the body temperature wouldn't arouse the doctor's suspicions. That meant working on a close timetable. We figure late that afternoon he stunned Dorf, probably with a blow on the back of the head. The bruise wouldn't show after the bullets smashed the skull. Very likely he gave Dorf heavy sedation to make sure of a long sleep.

"He then changed clothes with Dorf, bound and gagged him, and cut his hair to a crew cut like his own. The fallen hairs were collected, probably in a newspaper. Undoubtedly he vacuumed the carpet and the body's clothes to pick up any stray hairs. He didn't even forget to remove the bag of his vacuum cleaner, and put a fresh one in its place. And of course he made an entry in his diary to make sure we would know Miss Tyson had heard Mr. Cherington threaten his life. The diary was left in a drawer of his desk, where we would find it."

Mr. C. said, "I had no idea what hard work murder is. I don't think I'll ever try it."

"That was only the beginning. As we see it, Ebson then drove Dorf's car to the railroad station. There we figure he had another car waiting—not his regular car—that was in his garage—but one he had bought under an assumed name just for this one night's work. In that car he drove to New York, showed himself at the Swiss-American Society, then drove back to West Harbor.

"Somewhere nearby, possibly at some hotel, he stopped to telephone you, Mr. Cherington. In that way he made sure the call couldn't be traced to West Harbor, and additional doubt would be cast on your story. Once he was sure you were hooked, he had over an hour for the other things that needed to be done. He drove back to the house, put on your gloves, and battered Dorf's face beyond recognition."

"I can see him doing that," said Mr. C. "With a kind of detached pleasure—like a delinquent child pulling an insect to bits."

"He even remembered to hit Dorf

under the chin, where he himself had been hit by you, Mr. Cherington. And to remove the freckles from his own hands. None of us had ever observed Dorf's hands, so in appearing as Dorf it was safe for him to show hands without the spots.

"Then came the murder. He placed the body on the floor, shot out what features were left, put a final couple of bullets through the brain, and threw the gun and gloves into the old well. He knew the chances were we would find them. After that, all that remained was to establish Dorf's alibi beyond question. He took the ropes, gag, newspaper, vacuum bag—everything incriminating—put them in the car, and hid them somewhere, in some isolated hole he had prepared.

"Then, in his alibi car, he drove to New York, garaged the car—we expect to find it soon—and caught the last train back to West Harbor, making sure the conductor noticed him. On arrival he got into the jalopy, drove up to the house, and put on his act of astonishment at finding police waiting and his employer dead."

Stauffer thrust a hand through his hair, which was blond and stubborn, a good deal like his personality. "This is where the embarrassing part comes in. You may think—I know Miss Tyson does—that we should have spotted Ebson under his Dorf make-up. The fact is, Dorf looked nothing at all like the pictures I had seen of Ebson. The noses, for example—Ebson's was thin, Dorf's was thick. The impression he created as Dorf was simply that of a stupid man who liked his booze. His hair and eyebrows and that ridiculous mustache were perfect camouflage. He must have worked on them for months. And frankly, the notion that the murderer would voluntarily walk into our arms and identify the corpse didn't even occur to us. Of course we know now that he had to do that to prevent the police from pursuing Dorf, but at the time it certainly looked like the action of an innocent man."

The Lieutenant threw out his hands. "I know it's no use trying to justify myself. I pulled a boner. The other day Miss Tyson called me a dumb cop and she had a point. Still, I'd like you to remember that the man was an actor as well as a writer. He was taking a risk, but he carried it off. When we had him at the station he talked and behaved exactly as a nervous foreigner would be expected to under the circumstances. To show you how thorough he was, he even remembered to put his own fingerprints on Dorf's passport, and all over Dorf's room."

I could see how it might happen even to a bright cop—but last night's phone call from the airport still rankled, and I didn't want to make things too easy for him. "Just one point, Lieutenant. When you saw the corpse's face, didn't the possibility of a substitution cross your mind?"

"Come now, Miss Tyson," he said with a weary look. "How dumb are you trying to make me out? Of course I thought of it. But there were you and Mr. Cherington saying it was Ebson; and then the supposed Dorf came along and gave us an identification; and finally this man Dryfoos, when he brought us the letter, looked at the body and agreed. Were we supposed to ignore all that?"

Mr. C. said, "I guess I never did look at that face closely, and Sue went mostly by the hands. As for Myopic Mannie Dryfoos, he hasn't seen anything clearly for years, including literature. If the corpse had Ebson's clothes and haircut, he would agree."

"Perhaps that's why Ebson chose him as his agent," Stauffer said.

It seemed to me that I was entitled to stick one more small needle into that handsome hide. "When Dorf took off for Switzerland didn't the alarm bell ring then?"

The way he winced was rather charming. "It worried me, if that's what you mean. But I thought I had my murderer—and Dorf's letter of explanation, written in a foreign-looking script, was realistic and convincing. Also, the Swiss police confirmed his arrival. What we didn't realize, of course, was that he promptly flew from Switzerland to Mexico. And right after that Rosencuist appeared at Acapulco, to wait for his money."

Mr. Eager said, "Perhaps it is germane to add that he would not even have had to return to this country. He had instructed me to effect the best possible settlement without a trial, and to transfer the money to him in Mexico."

"Once he received the money," Stauffer said, "no doubt he would just have faded away. And somewhere—say, in Brazil or Argentina—he would have shown up with still another name, a different appearance, and a huge bank account." He gave me a returning-good-for-evil look as he added, "If it hadn't been for Miss Tyson."

Mr. C. turned to me with a smile that reminded me of that Christmas kiss. "Yes, that's what I've been waiting to hear—how you discovered, Ebson was Rosencuist."

"Oh," I said airily, "it was just Nameology."

"What's that?" Forrest demanded.

I explained. "My friend Lucy Evans pointed out that Rosencuist has c-o-b-r-a, cobra, in his name, if you include the Daniel. Earlier we had noticed that Curtis D. Ebson has all the letters for cobra except the 'a.' That got me looking at their names again. Then I saw it. If you take D. B. Rosencuist and shift the letters around, you get Curtis D. Ebson. Or Ernst C. Dubois. Or Scot Burnside."

Mr. C. grabbed a pencil. After a minute he said, "Four anagrams!"

"In *The Quest for Identity*," I said, clearing my throat, "it says that one of the characteristics of the insecure when they turn to crime is their powerful unconscious urge to hold on to their former identities by using aliases with the same letters, or at least the same initials. And the more egotistical and cleverer the criminal, the more ingenious his alias is likely to be. Ebson was a way-out egotist and clever. He couldn't resist those anagrams."

"But wasn't he compounding his risk needlessly?" asked Mr. C.

Stauffer took it up. "Not so much as you might think. You can see how it began. When he founded The Libido Press, D. B. Rosencuist became Ernst C. Dubois. Nobody noticed. For the book, he used Scot Burnside. Still no one noticed. Then he writes other novels. He wants another name, one that isn't tainted. He finds it in still another anagram of his own name—Curtis D. Ebson. And still no one saw it. Then he planned the murder. Who was going to match the late Ebson with the living Rosencuist? He felt perfectly safe, and he also had the satisfaction of knowing how clever he was."

With that the Lieutenant stood up to go. "I owe you an apology, Mr. Cherington."

"Forget it," said Mr. C. "I'm grateful to be out from under."

They were all being terribly clubby. I walked out to my own desk, sat down, and doodled until the party broke up. The Lieutenant came by, stopped, looked at me, muttered, "I'll talk to you later," and went out.

When they were all gone, Mr. C. leaned over my desk. Even pale and with circles under his eyes, he looked attractive. "Sue, my dear," he said, "I couldn't say this in front of the others, but is there anything in the world I can give you that you want?"

A funny thing. If he had asked me a week earlier, I would have thought at once of a small plain gold ring fitted to the third finger of my left hand. But now, somehow, it was different. I still felt maternal about him, but it was more the kind of feeling I have for my cat. I said, "How about an extra week's vacation this summer?"

"Don't be so modest," he said, laughing. "A substantial interest in the company would be more like it. I tell you what, let's have dinner tonight and work it out."

I said, "Oh, I'm sorry, Mr. C. I don't think I can tonight."

He looked at me oddly. "Well, a man is never too old to yearn. Some other time soon, then?"

He had hardly left when my phone rang. It was Lieutenant Stauffer. He said, "You wouldn't by any chance be free for dinner tonight, would you?"

I looked down at the doodle pad on my desk, where I had printed his name, *JOHN T. STAUFFER*. The Nameological letters that had popped up at me were h-o-t s-t-u-f-f, and f-a-s-t-e-r f-u-n.

"Yes," I said. "As it happens, by any chance I am free."

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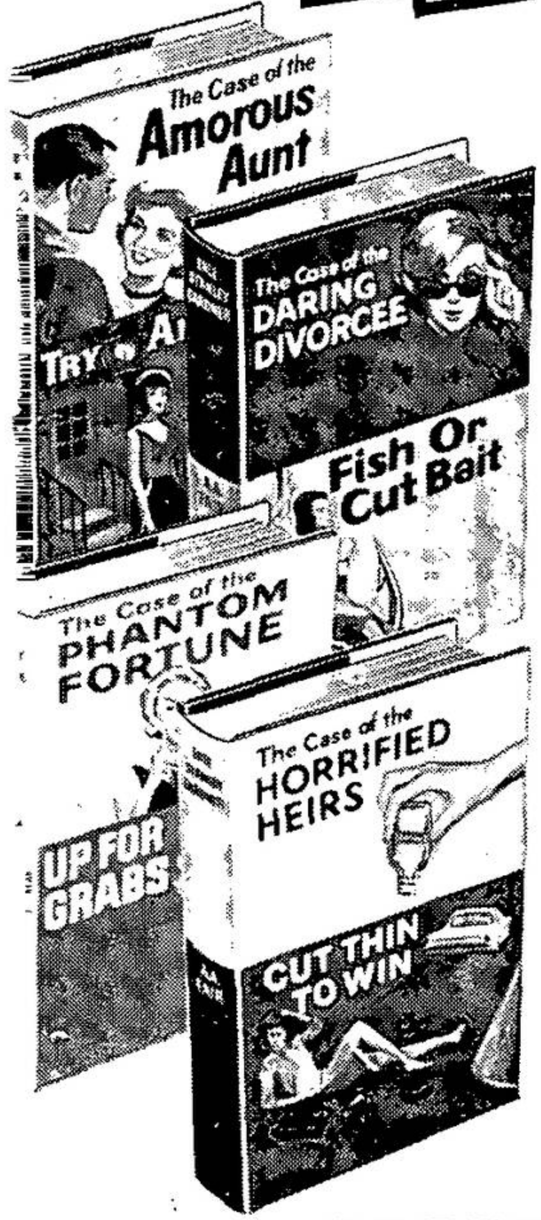
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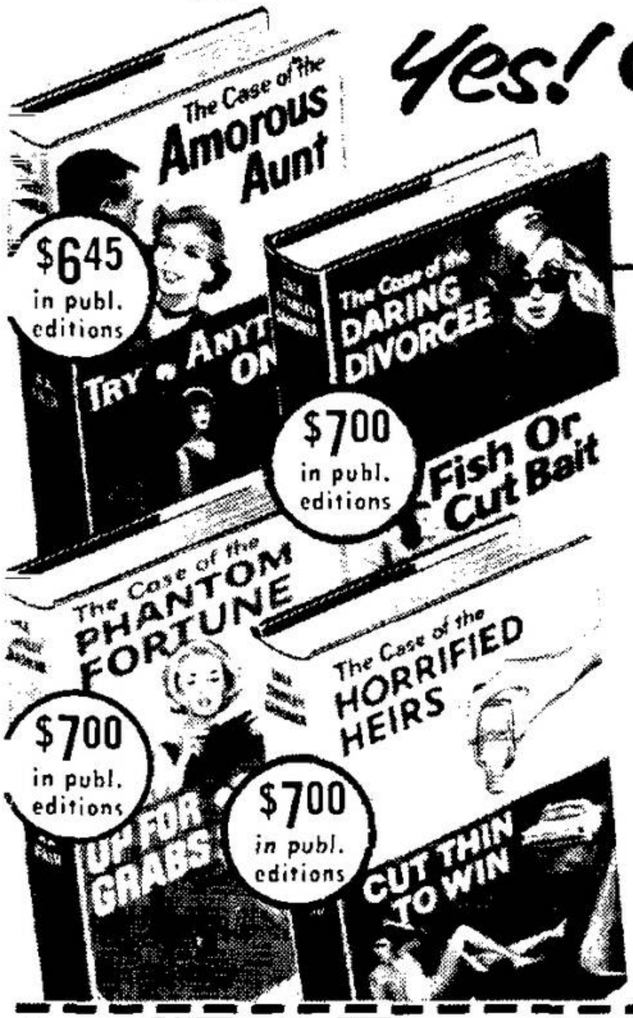
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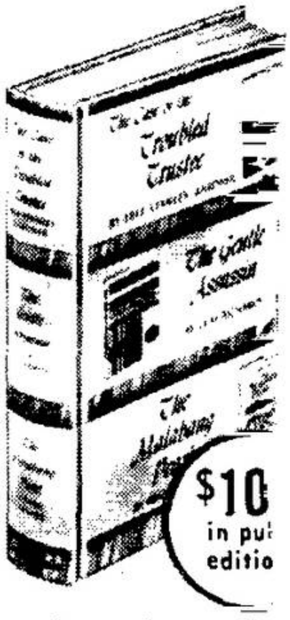
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